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गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय
कृपया पुस्तक के ऊपर कोई निशान आदि
न लगायें।

पुस्तकालय
गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय, हरिद्वार

बर्ग संख्या.....

आगत संख्या.....

पुस्तक—वितरण की तिथि नीचे अंकित है। इस तिथि सहित २० वें दिन तक यह पुस्तक पुस्तकालय में वापिस आ जानी चाहिए। अन्यथा १० पैसे के हिसाब से विलम्ब-दण्ड लगेगा।

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TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

A SCHOLARLY AND CRITICAL JOURNAL

HENRY HART, "Seamus Heaney's Poetry of Meditation:
Door into the Dark"

EILEEN BARRETT, "Matriarchal Myth on a Patriarchal Stage:
Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*"

Cowinners of the 1987 *Twentieth Century Literature* Prize
in Literary Criticism

Other Essays on

John Barth's *LETTERS*

Virginia Woolf's "A Society"

Brecht and Lessing

Uncollected Stories of Angus Wilson

Food in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*

Rose Macaulay

VOLUME 33

SPRING 1987

NUMBER

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Collection Lawrence Durrell.

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Seamus Heaney's Poetry of Meditation: *Door into the Dark*

Cowinner of the 1987 TCL Prize in Literary Criticism

HENRY HART

Images of dark and light appear so frequently in poetic tradition that, when summoned for contemporary use, they run the risk of being immediately obsolescent. Each poet must dust off the old clichés and glaze them with new varnish. For Seamus Heaney, who is more attached to tradition than most, darkness and light dramatize his most pressing concerns. In his first book, *Death of a Naturalist*, as Dick Davis has pointed out, "Darkness is associated with an uncontrollable fecundity, a pullulation of alien, absorbing life."¹ Darkness is persistently linked to Heaney's adolescent fears of sex and death, and light to their possible transcendence.

Many critics refuse to accept Heaney's second book, *Door into the Dark*, as an "advance on its predecessor,"² but surely it indicates a significant psychological advance. Rather than run from the dark, Heaney now faces up to it with grim determination, or actively seeks it out. He mines the metaphor of a "door into the dark" so extensively that many of his poems can be read allegorically. Still preoccupied with country matters—with farming, fishing, thatching, forging—he casts his rural personae in roles that dramatize the oppositions dueling in his imagination. Dark and light are now associated with speech and writing, forgetting and remembering, expiration and inspiration, blindness and insight, destruction and creation. The poems are intensely self-reflexive

TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

as they investigate their own perplexed making. Although Blake Morrison claims that "*Door into the Dark* is more promise than fulfillment, more hovering on the threshold than a decisive arrival,"³ Heaney's narrators restlessly cross back and forth over thresholds. Like traditional Christian meditations, their crossings from confusion to revelation, from mute blindness to luminous communion with the divine, are overshadowed by the Cross itself.

For a poet who attended a Catholic school as a young man (St. Colomb's College), the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, as well as of his compatriots St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, must have presented obvious parallels to poetic practices. James Joyce, whose role as a mentor Heaney acknowledges at the end of "Station Island," may have suggested some of these. Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist* finds Loyola's "composition of place" in the hellfire sermon so imaginatively effective that its central dictum "to imagine with the senses of the mind . . . the material character"⁴ of all things and events, when filtered through Aquinas, becomes his fundamental aesthetic principle. In *The Poetry of Meditation*, Louis Martz has demonstrated how Renaissance poets often derived narrative models from Loyola's pattern of composition of place, self-analysis, and colloquy, and dwelled on the psychological processes behind them: memory, reason, and will.

While Heaney's meditations focus on scenes of artistic rather than Christian passion, they employ traditional meditational techniques in doing so. Their "compositions" of rustic artificers, who sacrifice financial contentment and bodily vigor in their devotion to outmoded crafts, act as reflectors in which Heaney analyzes his own procedures. His soul-searching is often self-incriminating. Rather than carry on a colloquy with the godhead, normally he bears silent witness to craftsmen of his own ilk. Like Joyce, he finds in the divine author of creation a metaphor for the authorial imagination, praising and accusing it accordingly. Poetry, which for Heaney includes all makings, is a substitute religion, but one which he never wholeheartedly reveres since it too mystifies the word. While his meditating narrators withdraw from the world into a pregnant, darkened silence, he often accuses them of narcissism, of stubbornly denying life. If in the womb of the imagination secular as well as holy words are made flesh, as Dedalus attests, the desire to regress can be infantile and defeating.

Heaney's emblematic "door into the dark" has numerous religious and literary precedents. It may come from the Bible: "I am the door: by me if any man shall enter in, he shall be saved" (John, 10:9), where Christ is promising salvation for all. St. Teresa uses the metaphor in the

SEAMUS HEANEY'S *DOOR INTO THE DARK*

initial stages of her meditational treatise, *The Interior Castle*, declaring: "the door by which to enter this castle is prayer and meditation."⁵ It is implicit in St. John of the Cross's meditation, *The Dark Night*, in which the soul passes through a door in a darkened "house of the senses" to venture into a night infused with divine illumination. St. John explains:

When this house of the senses was stilled (that is, mortified), its passions quenched, and its appetites calmed and put to sleep through this happy night of the purgation of the senses, the soul went out in order to begin its journey along the road of the spirit, which is that of proficients and which by another terminology is referred to as the illuminative way or the way of infused contemplation. . . .⁶

Poems form the kernels of St. John's meditations, and Heaney translates one of these ("Song of the Soul that Rejoices in Knowing God through Faith") in "Station Island," and compares its theme of the dark night to St. Patrick's Purgatory on Lough Derg. In his second book the "dark night" is a metaphor for the imagination which burns most intensely when darkened to the world.

Heaney's "door" is archetypal rather than specific. It may echo the "spiritual windows and doorways"⁷ in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the anonymous medieval book on mysticism which holds that the doors of worldly perception must be closed so that the meditator can approach God's light. According to Benedict Kiely, Heaney's poetics are based on "the cloud of unknowing [and] . . . what Patrick Kavanagh . . . called the fog, 'the fecund fog of unconsciousness.'" Kavanagh said that we have to shut our eyes to see our way to heaven. "What is faith, indeed, but a trust in the fog; who is God but the King of the Dark?" In "A Raid into Dark Corners," Kiely traces Heaney's poetic mysticism to Catholic roots. From what Heaney calls the "negative dark that presides in the Irish Christian consciousness . . . the gloom, the constriction, the sense of guilt, the self-abasement," comes his poetic contention: "I think this notion of the dark centre, the blurred and irrational storehouse of insight and instincts, the hidden core of the self—this notion is the foundation of what viewpoint I might articulate for myself as a poet."⁸

Joseph Conrad's "door of Darkness" and "door opening into a darkness"⁹ in *Heart of Darkness*, Robert Frost's poem, "The Door in the Dark," and the illuminating, purgatorial darknesses in Yeats's "Byzantium" and Eliot's *Four Quartets*, perhaps gave further support to Heaney's metaphor. But Heaney stakes out territory that is unmistakably his own even while occupying the eminent domain of others. His emphasis on ascetic withdrawal into the dark, for example, remains free

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of the mystic's grim desire for mortification. While St. John and St. Teresa relish God's "delicious wounds of love," and Loyola advises the retreatant to end his first week by chastizing "the body by inflicting actual pain on it . . . by wearing hairshirts or cods or iron chains, by scourging or beating,"¹⁰ Heaney retreats from temporary distractions and confusions in a less melodramatic way: by walking, driving his car, or, like Kavanagh, by simply shutting his eyes.

Heaney embraces the mystic's sensory deprivation and renewed concentration, but for secular purposes. St. Teresa summed up the contemplative's "rite of passage" in the Fifth Mansion of *The Interior Castle*: "God deprives the soul of all its senses so that He may the better imprint in it true wisdom: it neither sees, hears, nor understands anything while it lasts."¹¹ For the traditional Christian, the purgative way culminates in unity with God through grace and love. But when Heaney requisitions Catholic spiritual exercises, he does so to focus better on their hallowed assumptions, which now seem hollow, and attacks their methods even as he employs them. If he aims for transcendent clarity, it is to obtain a better view of the ground he is trying, often foolishly, to transcend. If he quests for unity with a mysterious creative source, usually he finds it in a peat bog, his own head, or his wife, rather than in God. Rather than climb a ladder to heaven, Heaney opens his front door and discovers avatars of the Creator in the blacksmiths and thatchers of an ordinary town.

Perhaps the best example of Heaney's meditative style can be found in "The Forge," a sonnet whose first line provides the title of his second book. Unlike Yeats, who celebrated golden smithies of an ancient Byzantine empire, or Joyce, whose smithy was an adolescent aesthete dreaming of forging art but never quite managing to, Heaney fastens on a brawny artisan who, "leather-aproned, hairs in his nose," hammers out horseshoes. Heaney approaches this "maker" or "artist-god" in a traditional meditative way, by entering a dark "cloud of unknowing." He declares, "All I know is a door into the dark." The door is knowable but the dark beyond blinds him to a creative process which is ultimately unknowable. Heaney intimates correspondences between his blacksmith and a god, but then retracts them. The blacksmith may be one of God's intermediaries, a priest transubstantiating the materials of common experience into holy artifacts, but at the end he is fundamentally a common laborer beating "real iron out."

Profane denotations undercut their sacred connotations. The blacksmith's anvil resembles a mysterious omphalos at the center of space and time. Heaney says, "The anvil must be somewhere in the

SEAMUS HEANEY'S *DOOR INTO THE DARK*

centre." It is "Horned as a unicorn," a product of fairy tale and legend, as well as an eternal, "Immoveable . . . altar" where the blacksmith "expends himself in shape and music." Against this mythical background, however, he attends to secular makings rather than sacred ones, artifice rather than sacrifice, horseshoes rather than communion wafers. God's spirit in the last lines is no holy wind or breath inspiring the soul of a communicant, but simply the air pumped from the bellows onto the forge's coals. If the blacksmith is an archetype (a type of Hephaestus) he is also a common man on the verge of obsolescence, sadly at odds with the modern-day world of traffic outside his door. Cars have made horses nearly redundant, yet he continues to recollect better days and bang out shoes with heroic, if not pigheaded, devotion:

He leans out on the jamb, recalls a clatter
Of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows;
Then grunts and goes in, with a slam and flick
To beat real iron out, to work the bellows.

While Heaney admires his artificer, he refuses to gaze at him through the mystic's mystifying spectacles. By the end of the poem he has grounded the blacksmith firmly in the social and economic factors which determine and indeed threaten his existence.

Both Heaney and blacksmith follow the meditational paradigm of renunciation and reunion. While Heaney withdraws from the noisy bustle of traffic and the decaying yard of rust outside to glimpse the work inside, the blacksmith leans out the jamb and then returns to his forge. For Heaney, the outside world is governed by a grim, incontrovertible law of entropy and corruption, the inside world by a passionate, irrational will to creation:

Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting;
Inside, the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring,
The unpredictable fantail of sparks. . . .

Outside things fall apart; inside, "somewhere in the centre," they are held together and hammered into unity.

In "The Forge" Heaney illustrates the *prelitteraturé*, instinctual, unconscious urges and binary oppositions he finds at the center of all creation. His essay, "The Makings of a Music," reveals these oppositions in similar fashion, but now in terms of Wordsworth and Yeats. In Wordsworth's poetry, he writes, "What we are presented with is a version of composition as listening, as a wise passiveness, a surrender to energies that spring within the centre of the mind."¹² Likewise, in "The Forge," Heaney listens passively to the "short-pitched ring" of the anvil "in the centre" of the shop. But he follows Yeats too, for whom

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"composition was no recollection in tranquility, not a delivery of the dark embryo, but a mastery, a handling, a struggle towards maximum articulation. . . . Thoughts do not ooze out and into one another, they are hammered into unity." "All reality," Yeats notes, "comes to us as the record of labour."¹³ Although Heaney's smith recollects the old equestrian days, at the end he repudiates nostalgic musing and hammers "real iron" in a fury of labor.

Blake Morrison contends in his book on Heaney that "What links the various traders, labourers and craftsmen who fill his first two books is that, unlike him, they are lacking in speech"¹⁴ and that Heaney, embarrassed by the linguistic sophistication provided by a university education,

found himself in the position of valuing silence above speech, of defending the shy and awkward against the confident and accomplished, of feeling language to be a kind of betrayal. . . . But the community Heaney came from, and with which he wanted his poetry to express solidarity, was one on which the pressure of silence weighed heavily.¹⁵

In Catholic Northern Ireland, speaking your mind can be a dangerous business. For social and political reasons Heaney elevates his mother's dictum, "Whatever you say, say nothing," into a poetic principle. He celebrates silence to underscore solidarity with his Irish Catholic ancestors and peers. But silence is also part of the knowing "ignorance" and self-inflicted "blindness" of meditation. "You must become an ignorant man again," Stevens said in his long meditation, "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction," "And see the sun again with an ignorant eye." In "The Forge," when the smithy ignores the fleeting present and focuses in silence on a radiant, sempiternal source (the forge of blazing coals), Heaney follows suit. Expiration—his figurative dying away from the environment—necessarily entails a repression of speech which, with luck, makes way for linguistic inspiration and the sublimation that is writing. Heaney and his compatriots may keep quiet to avoid sectarian recrimination; they also keep quiet to meditate and write.

Oppositions such as speech and writing, myth and fact, intellect and intuition, work and play, and hierarchies that have valued one over the other, receive a new ordering from Heaney. If a logocentric preference for the spoken has devalued the written in Western thought, as Derrida insists, Heaney tends to celebrate the concrete accomplishment of writing over the evanescence of speech. While traditional Christian meditations culminate in colloquies, "in which the soul speaks intimately with God and expresses its affections, resolutions, thanksgiv-

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ings, and petitions,"¹⁶ Heaney's conclude with speechless, writerly acts. His blacksmith, for example, merely "grunts"—he never speaks. In "deconstructing" the hierarchies foisted by Platonic and Christian tradition, Heaney is also going against an Irish grain. Hugh Kenner points out in *A Colder Eye* that:

Irish writers have always been naggingly aware that Irishmen do not as a rule buy books, have never bought them, have even inherited a tradition whereby to write when you might be talking is an unnatural act. . . . And sensing that written words can even be *dangerous*, the Republic employs pretty active censors, who in addition to keeping out *Playboy*, contraceptive advice, and tons of quick-turnover porn, have interfered with some poets and with nearly every major prose writer.¹⁷

Heaney protests the view that writing is "unnatural" as well as Socrates' view that it is a superfluous supplement, a "semblance of truth" causing forgetfulness and deception. He affirms that, like sex, it derives from a natural urge to reproduce life out of life, and that its considered messages may contain more pungent truths than the less premeditated utterances of speech.

In "The Peninsula" Heaney specifically addresses the traditional opposition of speech and writing, and casts his investigation in the form of a meditation. The poem recounts a passage into a "dark night" which blinds the poet to an unremarkable present so that, like the blacksmith, he can recall the past in graphic detail. Writing here is not an unnecessary appendage to or a repression of speech; it is a natural complement of speech:

When you have nothing more to say, just drive
For a day all round the peninsula.
The sky is tall as over a runway,
The land without marks so you will not arrive

But pass through, though always skirting landfall.

At the start, the landscape appears to be a text, but one erased of all "marks" of speech and writing. The emptying is a necessary purgation which, in time, will make space for a new "annunciation," a new influx of words. The "negative way" has its dangers (landfalls, darkness), as the mystics warned, but Heaney's journey ends with renewed inspiration. Reality is eclipsed, but then recalled by the mind as it finds what will suffice for its poem:

At dusk, horizons drink down sea and hill,
The ploughed field swallows the whitewashed gable
And you're in the dark again. Now recall

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The glazed foreshore and silhouetted log,
 That rock where breakers shredded into rags,
 The leggy birds stilted on their own legs,
 Islands riding themselves out into the fog. . . .

The birds and islands are emblems of the poet who is also doubled-back on himself, who meditates on the writerly imagination by means of the imagination. When the meditation concludes, perception is clarified. Things are seen in their *quidditas*, their unique thingness, radiantly and cleanly defined. Previously unfocused, the speechless poet is now prepared to uncode the landscape and translate what he reads into writing. Heaney admonishes:

drive back home, still with nothing to say
 Except that now you will uncode all landscapes
 By this: things founded clean on their own shapes,
 Water and ground in their extremity.

Rather than write an imagist poem Heaney writes a poem about how one gets written.

In an intriguing essay on Andrew Marvell's use of the "self-inwoven simile or . . . short-circuited comparison," Christopher Ricks quotes from "The Peninsula" to show how Heaney draws on the earlier poet's legacy. "The reflective image," Ricks claims, "simultaneously acknowledges . . . opposing forces and yearns to reconcile them," and may refer to the "art of poetry . . . philosophical problems of perception and imagination"¹⁸ as well as to the raging factions in Marvell's England and Heaney's Northern Ireland. While Heaney's "self-inwoven" meditations become more overtly political in later books, in *Door into the Dark* they aim primarily at reconciling factions poised in the poetic imagination. The symbolic "birds stilted on their own legs" and "Islands riding themselves out into the fog," while providing images for the self-conscious poet also dramatize the paradox of creation, which is partly controlled and partly uncontrollable. Frost once claimed that a poem evolved through a happy series of accidents like a piece of ice on a hot stove riding on its own melting. Heaney's islands ride the same conscious and unconscious flow.

"The Peninsula," in its "self-inwoven" way, criticizes meditative tradition even as it follows its basic structures. Like Roland Barthes, who complained in his essay on Ignatius Loyola that too often commentators on *The Spiritual Exercises* succumb to "the old modern myth according to which language is merely the docile and *insignificant* instrument for the serious things that occur in the spirit, the heart or the soul,"¹⁹ Heaney deems language all-important and all-encompassing. In *The Spiritual*

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Exercises themselves, Barthes notes, "there is the awareness of human aphasia: the orator and the exercitant, at the beginning, flounder in the profound deficiency of speech, as though they had nothing to say and that a strenuous effort were necessary to assist them in finding a language."²⁰ He concludes: "The invention of a language, this then is the object of the *Exercises*."²¹ This is the object of "The Peninsula" as well, where the silent driver quests for linguistic renewal.

But Heaney's new encoding is stubbornly rooted in the material world. Loyola has a more transcendent goal. He develops a language of prayers that, paradoxically, subvert human language as they prepare the meditator for an otherworldly sign. Loyola strives for "indifference," the opposite of language, which is a system of differences. God the Maker is God the Marker. He signifies the way as the meditator searches for election and vocation:

The exercitant's role is not to choose, i.e., to mark, but quite the contrary to offer for the divine mark a perfectly equal alternative. The exercitant must strive not to choose; the aim of his discourse is to bring the two terms of the alternative to a homogeneous state. . . . This paradigmatic equality is the famous Ignatian *indifference* which has so outraged the Jesuit's foes: to will nothing oneself, to be as disposable as a corpse.²²

Heaney's meditation moves in an opposite direction. He passes through linguistic indifference (the unmarked landscape and his own silence) to a situation where differences are marked, distinct shapes uncoded, and not by God but by himself.

Heaney's parable of reading and writing could have been suggested by Joyce's *Ulysses* where Stephen takes an epistemological stroll along Sandymount strand ("water and ground in their extremity"). Stephen reads in the "signatures of all things,"²³ wondering whether the world is an apparition of words in his head or composed of actual objects that might hurt if he knocked his head against them. Both Dedalus and Heaney conclude that the world has a degree of independent existence, but that the writer's duty is to manipulate codes of realism in order to deliver a facsimile of "things founded clean on their own shapes."

If Heaney is prescriptive (he asserts "you *will* uncode all landscapes") he is also diagnostic, analyzing how the meditative mind capitulates to "codés" that mystify as they pretend to mediate reality. Mystics of the *via negativa*, following the example of Dionysus the Areopagite, assert that only signs or signatures of God can be known and that God's book (the created universe) conceals as much as it reveals. Heaney diagnoses this linguistic mystification in the poem, "In

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Gallarus Oratory," a title combining notions of speech (oratory) and religious withdrawal (an oratory is a small chapel for special prayers). As in "The Forge" and "The Peninsula" Heaney renounces speech as he enters the sacred dark of the early Christian oratory (in Gallarus on the Dingle peninsula), but his composition of place and self-analysis, rather than bringing him closer to God, brings him closer to those monks in the past whose rapport with God he respects but cannot quite share.

His oratorical poems, so conscious of their rhetoric and fictive status, resemble the oratorical prayers of the monks in their passion but not their goals. While drawn to the old chapel, like Larkin in "Church-Going," he also intimates that the earlier communicants were both literally and figuratively "in the dark." All the images contribute to a sense of claustrophobic oppressiveness. The community's awareness of sin and fallenness is so strong it resembles a gravitational force pulling them down and burying them in a grave or "barrow." Heaney's meditative door opens on "A core of old dark walled up with stone / A yard thick." The monks, not unlike Robert Frost's "old-stone savage" who "moves in darkness . . . / Not of woods only and the shade of trees" ("Mending Wall"), enter a dark night that Heaney records with ambivalence:

When you're in it alone
You might have dropped, a reduced creature
To the heart of the globe.

What for Heaney is a hypothetical situation, however, for the earlier monks was a dire exigency. Their sense of fallenness was irrevocable: "No worshipper / Would leap up to his God off this floor." The "heart" and "core" of this place at first seem radically different from the creative altar "at the centre" of the blacksmith shop.

But as Heaney begins the sextet of his sonnet, he reveals the traditional turn of a meditation from dark trials to uplifting illuminations, from morbid concentration on evil to a vision of God's grace. The dead awaken, as if resurrected from their graves (but, ironically, like pagan Vikings who were once buried in barrows):

Founded there like heroes in a barrow
They sought themselves in the eye of their King
Under the black weight of their own breathing.
And how he smiled on them as out they came,
The sea a censer, and the grass a flame.

Although the monks obediently scour their souls, they seem pressured into doing so by the "king." They burrow inward, but have nowhere else to go. When they emerge after systematically deranging their senses, as

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Rimbaud would say, they uncode all landscapes, but in a sacramental as opposed to a realistic way. For a Catholic from Northern Ireland, "King" is hardly an innocent word. If for the monks it signifies an angry, jealous God, for Heaney it also implies the brutality of an imperialist master.

At the center of the Gallarus chapel is the oratorical scene in which spiritual words are delivered up to God, who in turn in-spirits the communicants with holy Words and with a mystic vision of censers and flames. But in this logocentric arena Heaney does not offer the traditional Catholic response. He does not pray or speak; he observes and writes. He may be recollecting the instructions of Loyola, "Every time I breathe in, I should pray mentally, saying one word of the 'Our Father' . . . so that only one word is uttered between each breath and the next,"²⁴ but he also mocks his heavy-breathers by making them seem uncontrollably narcissistic. The communicants, "Under the black weight of their own breathing," pray in a gothic atmosphere worthy of the stultifying enclosures of Edgar Allan Poe. Their sublime visions of censers and flames may be hallucinations bred out of repression. A nonbeliever, Heaney still expresses empathy for the Gallarus monks. "On a television talk," Benedict Kiely remarks, Heaney explained "how he felt that if all churches were like this one, 'congregations would feel the sense of God much more forcefully.'" ²⁵ That force, however, may be a psychopathological one.

As Heaney dismantles a religious heritage to which he still feels partly enthralled, his poems resemble a workshop littered with old icons and "trial pieces" constructed to replace them. His narratives, which are full of grammatical negatives, usually negate past myths to make way for more realistic alternatives. His meditations, like their classical paradigms, move toward love with increasing frequency, but celebrate its worldly rather than its apocalyptic vestments. In "Girls Bathing, Galway 1965," he begins negatively:

No milk-limbed Venus ever rose
Miraculous on this western shore.
A pirate queen in battle clothes
Is our sterner myth.

After the first negation, Heaney draws attention to the way his mind doubles back on itself, washing away the dusty images of the past after it casts them up for contemplation: "The breakers pour / Themselves into themselves, the years / Shuttle through space invisibly." In time the apocalyptic sea changes them too, mixing tales of Christian judgments with tales of Irish pirates:

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The queen's clothes melt into the sea

And generations sighing in
The salt suds where the wave has crashed
Labour in fear of flesh and sin
For the time has been accomplished. . . .

Heaney brilliantly invokes expectations of Christian apocalypse only to assert the living reality that such myths deny. Unlike St. John on Patmos, who envisioned a sea offering up the dead for judgment, Heaney imagines the sea offering up ordinary girls in bathing suits:

As through the shallows in swimsuits,
Bare-legged, smooth-shouldered and long-backed
They wade ashore with skips and shouts.
So Venus comes, matter-of-fact.

While Christian mystics clamor for spiritual marriages with the divine love, and classical mythmakers dream of beautiful women born out of sea foam like Venus, Heaney welcomes a flesh-and-blood beauty to counter the etherealized women of old.

In tracing the arduous process in which the mind purges its images to create them anew, Heaney's meditations resemble what Mircea Eliade called "the eternal return." They seek to abolish temporal history in order to recover the timeless void out of which new order or "cosmos" burgeons. For cultures that regard action as ritualistic repetitions of archetypes, Eliade claims:

1. Every creation repeats the pre-eminent cosmogonic act, the Creation of the world.
2. Consequently, whatever is founded has its foundation at the center of the world (since, as we know, the Creation itself took place from the center.)²⁶

For Joyce, the artist repeated the cosmogonic act by writing, so that "the mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished."²⁷ Heaney's imagination is similarly ritualistic, gravitating toward "centers" in order to repeat profane as well as sacred acts of creation which, he often painfully confesses, are wedded to destructions. In "The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon," a poem reminiscent of Robert Lowell's metaphysical fishing poems, the poet is the Fisher King, both victimized fish and Christ-like, "recreational" fisherman. Heaney, *in imitatione Christi*, follows the fish as it withdraws from the sea toward an interior space, a contemplative center. Here destruction is united with its opposite:

you flail

Inland again, your exile in the sea

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Unconditionally cancelled by the pull
Of your home water's gravity.

And I stand in the centre, casting.

At the "centre" a created and captivating "lure" unites fisher and wounded fish.

I go, like you, by gleam and drag

And will strike when you strike, to kill.
We're both annihilated on the fly.

If at-one-ment with God's crucified body (Christ's symbol was the fish) is the sacred analogue, Heaney repeats it in the common experience of fishing. As the lure unifies opposed forces, so does the poem, which is a love song to the fish as much as an elegy for its annihilation.

Heaney may have found support for his views on circularity and recurrence in Emerson, who in his essay "Circles" wrote:

The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world. St. Augustine described the nature of God as a circle whose centre was everywhere and its circumference nowhere.²⁸

Heaney, likewise, finds circles everywhere. In "The Plantation," for example, he maps an eternal cycle of creation and destruction, which at first bewilders him. As he withdraws from the disturbing present—the "hum of the traffic"—his meditation as before strives to locate emblems for its own doubling back, its own circularity. The plantation provides a historical emblem too; the cycle of invasion and domination has recurred so many times in Ireland that Heaney regards it as archetypal. His act of communion invokes master and slave, victim and victimizer, English landlord (Munster was divided into hierarchical plantations in the 1580s) and Irish tenant. Heaney dramatizes the combination of psychological and historical antinomies with a familiar but haunting fairy tale:

You had to come back
To learn how to lose yourself,
To be pilot and stray—witch,
Hansel and Gretel in one.

When he begins his investigations, "Any point in that wood / Was a centre." Now he is lost, traveling in circles, like the "toadstools and stumps / Always repeating" themselves. A meditative darkness ("the black char of a fire") marks his exclusion from society, but reveals those who have made similar journeys before: "Someone had always been

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there / Though always you were alone." As in "The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon," Heaney finally reveals his dual role as destroyer and creator, which unites him culpably to a process he would rather repudiate. He must play the reclusive witch, sacrificing childlike enthusiasms in order to redeem them in poems.

The last poem in *Door into the Dark* finds a new and startling image for the contemplative mind and its sacrifices in that most common of Irish landscapes: the bog. Rather than to a door in a blacksmith's shop or oratory, here Heaney is drawn to the bottomless "wet centre" of a tarn. His concentration is Emersonian; a "transparent eyeball" focuses in ever-intensifying circles on a mysterious center:

We have no prairies
To slice a big sun at evening—
Everywhere the eye concedes to
Encroaching horizon

Is wooed into the cyclops' eye
Of a tarn.

Concealing the sunlit world outside but penetrating the "dark night" inside, Heaney's eye glimpses its own reflection in the tarn, where images are received, broken down, preserved, and exhumed. The ground, like the mystic consciousness "wounded" by love, opens itself to all like

kind, black butter
Melting and opening underfoot,
Missing its last definition
By millions of years.

Its *caritas* seems ineffable and unknowable, archetypal rather than historical. He concludes:

Our pioneers keep striking
Inwards and downwards,
Every layer they strip
Seems camped on before.
The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage.
The wet centre is bottomless.

Common acts in the present again echo sacred ones of the past. His pioneers are turf-diggers who, like spiritual questors, ritually reenact the "eternal return" in their search for a mysterious, cosmogonic source.

The contrast between the expansive prairie and the vertical descent

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into the bog intimates a conflict in Heaney's mystic stance. If Heaney, like many Irishmen before him, is attracted by the "mystic" democracy of America (the country of prairies and pioneers), whose apotheosis is Walt Whitman's cosmic embrace of all created things, he is also irrevocably European as he plumbs tradition's hoard. He goes outward "to encounter the reality of experience," but also downward like an archaeologist to retrieve its reliquary forms. More like Joyce and Yeats than Whitman and Williams, he struggles to find in central institutions, such as the Catholic Church and its spiritual exercises, rituals and symbols for a faith he has lost but rediscovered in *poesis*. Whitman's apocalyptic rejection of European traditions is tempting, as is the American penchant for leveling hierarchies, decentering central institutions, and questing for democratic ideals in transcendent spaces, but Heaney's sensibility is as inextricably rooted in traditional poetic forms as in the political and religious institutions of Ireland. He wields the iconoclastic ax, but for the sake of revision rather than outright rejection. His emphasis on order and pattern is doggedly formalist, even though he overhauls old forms to make them consistent with contemporary experience.

While critics suspect Heaney's formalism to be part of a larger conservatism, and accuse him of stubbornly refusing to modernize himself, his unsettled attitudes with regard to both past and present seem particularly modern. A. Alvarez, for example, chastises Heaney for repudiating Modernism's "literary declaration of Independence" (however antiquated it may be in the 1980s) and claims: "If Heaney really is the best we can do, then the whole troubled, exploratory thrust of modern poetry has been a diversion from the right true way."²⁹ But Heaney's skepticism of "right true ways" and of the sensibility that tenders such illusions, makes him seem more modern than his detractors. His meditative style is troubled and exploratory. If it is not specifically informed by structuralist and post-structuralist debate, as Blake Morrison occasionally worries, it often predicts their major themes. Obsessed with such hierarchical oppositions as writing and speech, forgetting and remembering, blindness and insight, profane and sacred love, marginal and central institutions, Heaney typically reveals a dialectical relation where oppressively one-sided relations were the rule. His doors into the dark open onto a present inextricably wedded, for better or worse, to the past.

In "Literary History and Literary Modernity," an essay in *Blindness and Insight*, Paul de Man points out: "As soon as modernism becomes conscious of its own strategies . . . it discovers itself to be a generative

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power that not only engenders history, but is part of a generative scheme that extends far back into the past.”³⁰ Heaney’s premeditated forgettings and renunciations in *Door into the Dark* aim to purge earlier anxieties and the images that provoked them. “Make it new,” for Heaney as for Pound, also means “make it old.” De Man writes: “When [writers] assert their own modernity, they are bound to discover their dependence on similar assertions made by their literary predecessors, their claim to being a new beginning turns out to be the repetition of a claim that has always already been made.”³¹ Heaney’s meditations, which scrutinize their own procedures and compare them to all makings, find precedents in a tradition of Catholic meditation but give to the old forms a new complexity and an attractive, personal finish.

¹ Dick Davis, *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1982), p. 29.

² Blake Morrison, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 33.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1916), p. 127.

⁵ St. Teresa, *The Interior Castle*, ed. Hugh Martin (London: SCM Press, 1958), p. 19.

⁶ St. John of the Cross, *The Complete Works*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1973), p. 327.

⁷ Anon., *The Cloud of Unknowing*, trans. Clifton Wolters (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 52.

⁸ Benedict Kiely, “A Raid into Dark Corners,” *The Hollins Critic*, VII, No. 4, p. 10.

⁹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, in *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, eds. Frank Kermode and John Hollander (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 1624, 1634.

¹⁰ St. Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Thomas Corbishley (London: Burns & Oates, 1963), p. 36.

¹¹ St. Teresa, *The Interior Castle*, p. 55.

¹² Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations* (London: Faber, 1980), p. 63.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁴ Morrison, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1954), p. 27.

¹⁷ Hugh Kenner, *A Colder Eye* (New York: Knopf, 1983), p. 16.

¹⁸ Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 54–55.

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), p. 39.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

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²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 72–73.

²³ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage, 1914), p. 37.

²⁴ St. Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises*, p. 85.

²⁵ Kiely, "A Raid into Dark Corners," p. 9.

²⁶ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1954), p. 18.

²⁷ Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 215.

²⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Selected Writings* (New York: Modern Library, 1940), p. 279.

²⁹ A. Alvarez, "A Fine Way with Language," *New York Review of Books*, 6 Mar. 1980, pp. 16–17.

³⁰ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 150.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

Matriarchal Myth on a Patriarchal Stage: Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*

Cowinner of the 1987 TCL Prize in Literary Criticism

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The title of Virginia Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*, offers the first clue that all in this work is not what it appears to be. Though the title refers to the play within the novel, it undermines the play's importance by calling attention to its gaps. The "real" plot takes place between the acts. While many critics notice this structural principle in *Between the Acts*,¹ feminist critics² thoroughly discuss its implications. As these critics show, Woolf uses levels of "betweenness"³ not only to grant her characters consciousness of themselves in life and art, but also to alert her readers to the fact that the feminist plot is hidden between the lines between the acts.

In her ground-breaking essay, "Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny," Jane Marcus uncovers some of the ways in which Woolf's feminism is encoded in *Between the Acts*. Noting that early in the novel Isa Oliver reads in Woolf's "language of fact" a rape story, Marcus traces the rape throughout *Between the Acts* and reads it as the warp of Woolf's feminist narrative. In particular, Marcus demonstrates the way in which Woolf rewrites Swinburne's "Itylus," a poem in which he himself had rewritten a famous mythic rape story, the Procne/Philomela myth. As Marcus puts it, "Woolf rewrites [Swinburne's] poem in order to straighten out

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priorities. *Between the Acts* tells us that 'what we must remember' is the rape; 'what we must forget' is the male rewriting of women's history."⁴ Judy Little further unravels the novel's feminist plot. In her "Festive Comedy in Woolf's *Between the Acts*" she argues that the classical scholar Jane Harrison is a major intellectual influence behind Woolf's final novel. Little suggests that Woolf's play within the novel is directly influenced by Harrison's description of pre-patriarchal ritual in *Ancient Art and Ritual*. In this essay I build upon the work of these and other critics to show how deeply Woolf has inscribed the feminist plot in *Between the Acts* and, at the same time, to suggest new ways in which this plot unfolds.

Despite the fragmentary appearance of the novel's plot, in fact, it conforms to unities of time and place. The novel opens on a June evening at Pointz Hall, the home of the Oliver family, and ends the following evening in the same location. The village players perform their annual pageant, written and directed by Miss La Trobe, on the Olivers' terrace during this summer day. The audience includes the Oliver family, their unexpected guests, William Dodge and Mrs. Manresa, and the local gentry.

Still, the reader familiar with Woolf's feminism remains perplexed. On the surface the novel has neither feminist characters nor explicit references to feminist ideas. And, unlike Woolf's other novels and essays, *Between the Acts* does not assert openly love between women. The connections between Lucy Swithin and Isa Oliver are fleeting at best, the effort between Lucy and La Trobe to bring about a common meaning fails, and La Trobe and her lesbian lover have parted before the novel begins. The opening passages are full of patriarchal identifiers—"Mrs. Haines, the wife of the gentleman farmer,"⁵ "Isa, his son's wife" (p. 4), "Mrs. Giles Oliver" (p. 6). And the intrusion of the male-identified Mrs. Manresa accentuates the dearth of significant moments between women.

Indeed, love itself feels stale within the novel. Heterosexual love exists out of obligation, sibling love out of habit. The only genuine love is between Giles Oliver and his father Bart, and signals the preponderance of male bonding. Rather than turn to one another, the women turn to the homosexual, William Dodge, from whom they had "nothing to fear, nothing to hope" (p. 113).⁶

Yet, as Marcus and Little argue, feminism thrives in *Between the Acts*. For example, the rape story Isa reads is a newspaper report of a woman gang-raped by soldiers in a barracks. While Isa reads the story, Bart dreams of his life as a soldier. She associates her father-in-law with

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the rapists and though "gun-shy" (p. 19) interrupts his dream. Then, inspired by Lucy's entrance with a hammer in her hand, Isa imagines revenge against the rapist soldier: "the girl screamed and hit him about the face with a hammer" (p. 22). Isa carries the memory of the rape throughout the day. At the end of the novel, its plot is the one she yearns to complete: "The girl had gone skylarking with the troopers. She had screamed. She had hit him. . . . What then?" (p. 216). Thus, Woolf's feminist intentions can be uncovered through a contiguous reading of the plot. The feminist tragedy reveals itself through the juxtaposition of characters and imagery, as if Woolf invited us with a pun on Miss La Trobe not to miss the trope.

Such a reading points to a path through this labyrinthian text. Though on the surface Woolf appears to obfuscate her feminist intention with allusions to male poets and writers and La Trobe's survey of the male tradition, she actually calls that entire tradition into question. Encoded between the acts of the novel are signs that speak to a matriarchal past, reenact the slaughter of the goddess, symbolize the experience of women under patriarchy, and offer through the artist La Trobe the rescue of language and the imagination.

While the Oliver family awaits the arrival of Giles Oliver in the library, the narrator describes the blank vase and two paintings hanging in the house.⁷

Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent. The room was a shell, singing of what was before time was; a vase stood in the heart of the house, alabaster, smooth, cold, holding the still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence. (pp. 36-37)

The vase contains the "essence of emptiness, silence" as though space and time were interchangeable. The resultant paradoxes fascinate: the silent room sings, the empty vase holds. The image alludes directly to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn:" "Thou silent form, dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity."⁸

Woolf's response to Keats and all her male precursors is complex. She parodies his lovers' tale with the description of her two paintings. Bart's pompous male ancestor and the mysterious, unknown "lady" hang opposite a window as if gazing on their shared property. Woolf mocks Keats's Dionysian fantasy of heterosexual love with her Victorian pair when the narrator informs us that they had never met in life. To the unsuspecting visitor at Pointz Hall, this incongruous pair is mated, like Keats's frozen romance, eternally in art. The unknown "lady" signifies, of course, the namelessness of women in patriarchal society. Keats immortalizes a male vision of romance while Woolf reminds us of

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what happens to the woman who is perpetually immortalized in male art.

Although Keats's ode suggests stories but "not a soul to tell," Woolf's novel poignantly tells untold stories. Her use of Keats's ambiguous "still" associates his "unravish'd bride of quietness" with her "distilled essence of emptiness, silence" and places Keats's "as of yet" or "silent" unraped woman, along with her silent "lady" and the raped woman in the barracks, at the heart of her ode. At the same time, Woolf's vase "in the heart of the house" points to the many stories actually drawn on similar urns. Indeed it confirms the suspicion that Greek ritual and Greek and Egyptian myth⁹ lie in the interstices of the novel and, like the flower young George Oliver culls, they fill "the caverns behind the eyes with light" (p. 11).

Jane Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* and *Themis* describe matriarchal religion and suggest the possibility of pre-patriarchal matriarchy.¹⁰ It is not surprising that Woolf should turn to a past so rich in woman-identified imagery and we know of her respect for Harrison, whom she depicted in *A Room of One's Own*. In fact, Woolf's description of Harrison "on the terrace" is remarkably like La Trobe: "a bent figure, formidable yet humble, with her great forehead and her shabby dress—could it be the famous scholar, could it be J—H—herself?"¹¹ In addition, as Little argues, Harrison's study of primitive ritual in *Ancient Art and Ritual* influenced the structure and intention of Woolf's pageant within the novel.

According to Harrison, prehistoric people performed rituals to re-create an emotion felt rather than an event. The hunter who cannot hunt "breaks out into mimetic anticipatory action" to imitate not the hunt but the emotion felt while hunting.¹² The intention of the mime or actor in the *dromena*, or early ritual, was not to imitate the god, goddess, or animal, but "to emphasize, enlarge, enhance, his [sic] own personality."¹³ And, as Judy Little writes, Harrison "observed that art, since it has its roots in fertility rites, still retains as its main impetus the creation of emotion. . . ."¹⁴

Like an ancient priestess, as pageant director La Trobe intends to brew emotion (p. 94). Her interest lies less in imitating Chaucerian, Elizabethan, Restoration, or Victorian drama than in copying the cadence of their sentences and the tragic, comic, ribald, and sentimental elements in their plots. She yearns to capture the feeling common to each period and to stir atavistic emotions in her audience. She rejects the Homeric life history of the hero, refuses to replace it with the life history of the heroine, and returns, instead, to the subject matter of

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pre-Homeric ritual: the life history of the life spirit. She longs to destroy the boundaries between the actors and audience or, as she exclaims, "to write a play without an audience—the play" (p. 180).

Throughout the pageant, the untrained village actors bring so much of themselves to their roles that the audience sees the personality of the village performer merge with the character she or he portrays. In the case of Eliza Cook, the audience envisions Queen Elizabeth as a licensed vendor of tobacco. To imitate the Queen exceeds Eliza's knowledge and skill. Indeed, with the aid of costume, she expands her sense of herself to include Queen Elizabeth. The most disturbing performance is that of the village idiot. Because he plays himself, he threatens the audience with the possibility that there may be no role which might enhance self-knowledge nor heroic part which might disguise them from themselves.

Isa and Lucy separately understand La Trobe's intention. Isa clearly sees that the confusion is more to the point than the plot: "Did the plot matter? She shifted and looked over her right shoulder. The plot was there only to beget emotion" (p. 90). As Isa watches the story of the beldame united in the Elizabethan play with her lost child, she changes La Trobe's creative metaphor from "brew" to "beget." Though an ambivalent mother of young children, she identifies with the actor/crone and feels with her: "It was enough . . ." (p. 91). Watching the play also deepens Lucy Swithin's sense of herself. The emotions La Trobe has brewed stir in Lucy her unacted part. This experience compels her to bestow on La Trobe what is to the dramatist the supreme compliment: "What a small part I've had to play! But you've made me feel I could have played . . . Cleopatra!" (p. 153).

La Trobe's drama moves beyond its boundaries as it filters between the acts throughout the novel. For example, Giles identifies with Valentine, the young romantic hero in La Trobe's Restoration comedy, as he fantasizes about Mrs. Manresa. She, in turn, invents a romance between them: "I am the Queen, [Giles] my hero, my sulky hero" (p. 107). Actually Giles plays the unheroic part of the unctuous Sir Spaniel to Manresa's supercilious Lady Harraden. La Trobe's play parodies their afternoon of lust in the greenhouse and provides an interesting moment of art imitating life imitating art. Giles is drawn to Manresa because she "mak[es] him feel less of an audience, more of an actor" (p. 108) only to dramatically fool himself. The role he assumes, unlike the village idiot, hides him from himself. He misses La Trobe's point with his fixed distinction between actors and audience. He abandons this part when upon entering the barn during the pageant intermission he

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intuits the audience response: "Lucy clapped her hands. Giles turned away. She was mocking him as usual, laughing" (p. 109).

William Dodge, whose name suggests the evasiveness his sexual choice requires, longs to participate in a male love drama with Giles. But the crossed daggers on the coffee cup signal the only drama Giles would perform with him. As Lucy tells us of the Chinese theater, "put a dagger on the table and that's a battle" (p. 142). Giles vents his anger at William: "[William's] expression, considering the daggers . . . gave Giles another peg on which to hang his rage . . ." (p. 60).

Isa is perhaps the character in the novel *La Trobe* needs to move most. The feminist reader longs to see her move out of her lethargy and stagnation into participation. Isa's forced, constrained life—"she loathed the domestic, the possessive; the maternal" (p. 19)—consists, as William Dodge observes, of a series of domestic performances: "Then he saw her face change, as if she got out of one dress and put on another. . . . Then again she changed her dress. This time, from the expression in her eyes it was apparently something in the nature of a strait waist-coat" (pp. 105–06). While *La Trobe* mutters "I am the slave of my audience" (p. 211), Isa's life literally enslaves her. The emotion she musters up for Giles is, as she avows, "the cliché conveniently provided by fiction" (p. 14). Her real-life lusts and creative urges are aborted. She abandons her heterosexual fantasy of the gentleman farmer for the friendship of a homosexual conspirator, hides her poetry from her husband, and becomes paralyzed when on the verge of completing a rhyme. She witnesses her husband's infidelity and anticipates his double standard: "But Isa was immobile, watching her husband. . . . She could hear in the dusk in their bedroom the usual explanation. It made no difference; his infidelity—but hers did" (p. 110).

Yet *La Trobe's* play inspires Isa to action through three emotions, "Love. Hate. Peace" (p. 92). Though she fluctuates between thoughts of suicide—"That the waters should cover me" (p. 103)—and fantasies of murder, she invents and delivers a powerful performance to William, her sole audience, in front of the greenhouse:

She threw away the shred of Old Man's Beard that she had picked in passing and kicked open the greenhouse door. Dodge had lagged behind. She waited. She picked up a knife from the plank. He saw her standing against the green glass, the fig tree, and the blue hydrangea, knife in hand.

"She spake," Isa murmured. "And from her bosom's snowy antre

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drew the gleaming blade. 'Plunge blade!' she said. And struck. 'Faithless!' she cried. Knife, too! It broke. So too my heart," she said. (p. 113)

While Isa complains that the play runs through her head, in fact she narrates the plot of this vignette and acts the ambiguous part. She combines aspects of Juliet and Lady Macbeth to create her own heroine. Whether her character intends suicide or murder the act fails when the knife breaks. Still, the performance releases her from her characteristic passivity. In front of William Dodge, Isa plunges the knife with such force as to break it. This play allows her to rehearse a savage response to an emotion she will experience later in the novel.

The stage for her present performance, the greenhouse, is also the setting for another scene between the acts:

[Isa] had come out on to the path that led past the greenhouse. The door was kicked open. Out came Mrs. Manresa and Giles. Unseen, Isa followed them across the lawn to the front row of seats. (pp. 156-57)

In her dramatic fantasy Isa kills Giles for an infidelity she has not yet observed. Unfortunately, rather than celebrate an annual ritual, Isa gives us a single performance and her act offers only a temporary catharsis. Though La Trobe's pageant inspires her to action, it cannot free her yet from her patriarchal part. At thirty-nine, Isa is the age of the century, locked in patriarchal time and performing on a patriarchal stage.

Between the Acts contains a confluence of overt and covert references to goddesses suggestive of a matriarchal time. Not only do the characters and their actions echo the classical past, but Woolf's choice of birds, trees, cows, donkey, and snake is consistent with classical notions of nature representing goddess figures. Nature within the novel is neither the romantic object of contemplation nor merely the actor "tak[ing] its part" (p. 192).

Mrs. Manresa springs Athena-like from the male mind. Her name, "man" plus *res*, the Latin for thing, emphasizes her allegiances and establishes her as the image of the goddess in the male imagination. Her "ogling" and voluptuous movements exude earthy heterosexuality. Bart esteems Manresa—"a thorough good sort"—for her solidity and because "Giles would keep his orbit so long as she weighted him to the earth" (p. 119). Though Bart mocks Lucy for her belief in the expression "touch wood," its origin is the mythic giant Antaeus who, like Giles, needs Gaea to maintain his invincibility. The myth is reflected

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in Bart's expectations of women. He condemns his sister Lucy because: "There was nothing in her to weight a man like Giles to earth" (p. 116).

Contrary to what Bart's thoughts suggest, Lucy conjures up images of the goddess in the female imagination throughout the novel. While Bart and Giles bear legendary Christian names, Lucy's name is evocative of the goddess Lucina, and despite her association with Christianity,¹⁵ her belief in "one-making" shows a decided pre-Christian influence. Since the gold cross she caresses traces its roots to pagan religion, it might identify her as a goddess worshiper.¹⁶ Her circular tour of the imagination, though scoffed at by the audience skeptics, originates in ancient religion described by Jane Harrison:

Things can affect each other not only by analogy, because like affects like, but by that deeper thing *participation*, in a common life that serves for link. . . . Absurd, says the civilized rationalist. . . . But the wise savage knows better, they have all one quintessence, one life. . . .¹⁷

Lucy, the wise savage, is a subversive mocker of men rather than a pious Christian. Giles hangs his rage on William and his grievances on his "foolish, free" aunt because she is amused by the things that make his world go around: "buying and selling—ploughs? glass beads was it? or stocks and shares? . . ." (p. 47). While he excuses his father and Manresa, Giles blames this apparently nonthreatening old woman for the volatile climate in Europe.

Giles's discomfort around his aunt is not totally unfounded. The meek widow is a patriarchal facade. Though an avid reader of history, Lucy has essentially no past. She flutters like a dryad with mysterious connections and powers. Her "ancestress of sorts" (p. 7) comically contrasts with the portrait of the actual ancestor who holds "the rein in his hand" (p. 36). Lucy recognizes her connection to this Artemis-like figure with "a silver arrow in her hand" (p. 36). She follows this ancestress' lead "into silence" symbolic of women's namelessness in a culture bent on patriarchal naming. Accompanied by William, who "unfurled and straightened, as he strode beside her" (p. 67), Lucy climbs the stairs of the male ancestor's house in search of a matriarchal presence:

She went up, two stairs ahead of her guest. Lengths of yellow satin unfurled themselves on a cracked canvas as they mounted.

"Not an ancestress," said Mrs. Swithin, as they came level with her head in the picture. "But we claim her because we've known her—O, ever so many years. Who was she?" she gazed. "Who

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painted her?" She shook her head. She looked lit up, as if for a banquet, with the sun pouring over her. (p. 68)

Throughout the novel, Lucy is not the common audience but rather the exceptional one. Even when looking at this painting she practices her own art of "one-making" and dismantles the frame which separates her from the picture. Art begins to merge with life, for example, as Lucy and William mount the stairs and the model's satin dress appears to spread out from the canvas: "Lengths of yellow satin unfurled themselves." Though it is clearly Lucy who "shook her head" the ambiguous "She" of the last line fuses Lucy and her ancestress, life and art.

Lucy continues her ascent. Unable to reconcile herself with her mother, she quickly closes the door on her mother's old room. Not until she reaches the room in which she was born does she achieve the connection she seeks. The spirit of the goddess comes as a breeze, ruffles her hair, and rejuvenates her.

Lucy Swithin is, as Bart suggests, lightweight and flighty. The young villagers decorating the barn nickname her "Old Flimsy" and the narrator describes her as an old girl "with a wisp of white hair flying, knobbed shoes as if she had claws corned like a canary's" (p. 27). But Lucy's birdlike characteristics affirm her mythic connections. In the barn during tea, she identifies the swallows—important symbols in the augury of the goddess—as those returned from Africa. Thus she recognizes Isis, disguised as a swallow in search of her dismembered brother Osiris, and Procne, changed into a swallow after avenging the rape of her sister Philomela. Later, sitting in the library with her brother Bart, Lucy metamorphoses into a swallow: "She perched on the edge of the chair like a bird on a telegraph wire before starting for Africa" (p. 116).

After describing his sister thus, Bart ironically ignores the Osiris and Isis connection and absentmindedly recites Swinburne's "Itylus": "Swallow, my sister, O sister swallow . . ." (p. 116). As the narrator of Swinburne's poem, Bart assumes the role of Philomela. In the myth, Procne's husband Tereus raped Philomela and then, to silence her, cut out her tongue. Philomela, nonetheless, tells her sister of the atrocity by weaving her story upon a tapestry. In revenge of her sister's rape, Procne kills Itylus, her son by Tereus. To escape Tereus' wrath, Philomela becomes a nightingale and Procne a swallow.¹⁸

For Swinburne as for Bart, the blow against patriarchy supplants the crime against matriarchy. They usurp Philomela's voice to mourn the death of Itylus rather than the rape and suggest, as Jane Marcus

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notes, "that both sisterhood and revenge are unnatural."¹⁹ Indeed, as Madeline Moore observes, Swinburne's poem "moralizes about female guilt."²⁰ But, as Marcus points out, for Woolf the swallow and thus Procne, the revenger of the rape, is the center of her tale. Woolf warns of the Philomela impersonator when she announces that "nightingales didn't come so far north," while the swallow "chuckling over the succulence of the day" is ubiquitous (p. 3).

Like the mythic nightingale, Woolf embroiders the rape story within her narrative. Early in the novel, Isa sees between the lines of Swinburne's poem and, like the fabled Procne, she imagines revenge against the rapist. Isa does not read this rape story as an isolated incident; rather she sees it as indicative of the condition of women. Associated in the novel with the fruit tree, a primary symbol of female fertility, Isa, like Lucy, has other significant connections with her matriarchal origins.

While Giles and Manresa are in the greenhouse, and Lucy and La Trobe are attempting "to bring a common meaning to birth" (p. 152), Isa wanders into the stable yard "where the dogs were chained" (p. 155). Holding a hard piece of the tree's fruit, she imagines herself:

Fingering one of them she murmured: "How am I burdened with what they drew from the earth; memories; possessions. This is the burden that the past laid on me, last little donkey in the long caravanserai crossing the desert. "Kneel down," said the past. "Fill your pannier from our tree. Rise up, donkey. Go your way till your heels blister and your hoofs crack."

The pear was hard as stone. She looked down at the cracked flags beneath which the roots spread. "That was the burden," she mused, "laid on me in the cradle; murmured by waves; breathed by restless elm tress; crooned by singing women; what we must remember: what we would forget." (p. 155)

Like Lucy, Isa criticizes the "they" of patriarchy who have taken from the earth and invented the notion of possessions. Antaeus, the other gods, and the patriarchal fathers have drawn from Gaea, the earth mother, not only strength but the memory of their usurpation of her authority. And, as Jane Marcus suggests, like Philomela, Isa must remember and tell her story though the world of the fathers constantly forces women to forget.

Isa's imagining herself as a donkey suggests another mythic connection. According to *Lemprière's Classical Dictionary*, the feast of Priapus, literally the phallic god, was celebrated with the sacrifice of an ass. The choice of the donkey was punitive rather than adulatory. As

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Lemprière tells us, "that animal, by its braying, awoke the nymph Lotus to whom Priapus was going to offer violence" (emphasis mine).²¹ Translating Lemprière's euphemism, the reader sees that the ass warned Lotus of a violent rape. Lotus, in turn, implored the gods to intervene. They transformed her into a tree which now bears her name. As we know from Homer, eating of the fruit of the lotus tree induces dreamy listlessness and forgetfulness.²²

The fruit Isa holds is too hard to be eaten. Instead of forgetting, she imagines herself as the ass that warns and she hears women crooning what she must remember. She encourages herself, "'On, little donkey, patiently stumble . . .'" (p. 156), she forces herself to remember the story: "'Hear rather . . . the brawl in the barrack room when they stripped her naked'" (p. 156). To recall her matriarchal origins, to warn her sleeping sisters, and to invent new ways of avoiding rape are the burdens she must carry.

Another side of the mythic story runs throughout *Between the Acts*. While the women search for their origins, Giles reenacts the story of the god overthrowing and destroying the goddess. Giles along with his father Bart represents the civilized bellicosity of the contemporary male. As husband of Isa, he recalls Osiris, the sun god, and his Greek counterpart, Apollo. Inwardly he seethes with rage at the perceived impotence of his country. He despises not only Lucy, but also William, "a toady; a lickspittle" (p. 60), for his homosexuality and threat to virility.

During an intermission in the pageant, Giles makes his way to the barn and amuses himself with a stone-kicking game. With each kick of the stone, he identifies a target: Manresa is lust, William is perversion, and he himself is cowardice. Thus he gives a wry twist to the universal emotions Isa had named love, hate, and peace. For him, lust has more power than love; homosexuality, which for Giles imitates a role assigned to women, perverts and threatens the male order; and peace exists because men like himself are cowards. Indeed, his disdain for Lucy, Manresa, and William reflects his misogyny. Giles, then, is the reverser, inverter, perverter of Isa's ethos.

In *Themis* Harrison traces the snake back to the goddess: "In the days of the old-month-year the goddess herself was a snake."²³ In fact, she theorizes that the change from matriarchy to patriarchy is represented in myth by Apollo's slaying of the snake. M. Oldfield Howey supports Harrison's theory of violent struggle between two social orders:

It seems fairly clear that the original shrine at Delphi was

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dedicated to Ge, or Gaea, the goddess of earth, and Apollo probably superseded Gaea . . . and conquered the earlier inhabitants. Perhaps it is this event that is symbolized by the story of the slaying of the [serpent] Python by Apollo—the subjugation of the older religion,—henceforward to be regarded as the Evil one,—by the new.²⁴

Thus, when Giles kills the snake, he symbolically repeats Apollo's overthrow of the Earth cult and the initiation of the new order:

There, crouched in the grass, curled in an olive green ring, was a snake. Dead? No, choked with a toad in its mouth. The snake was unable to swallow; the toad was unable to die. A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. It was birth the wrong way round—a monstrous inversion. So, raising his foot, he stamped on them. The mass crushed and slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. But it was action. Action relieved him. He strode to the Barn, with blood on his shoes. (p. 99)

The circular snake that Giles destroys has the added significance of eternity and immortality, the attributes that in his rationality he longs to destroy. The snake choking on the toad is merely nature at its most indifferent, not a "monstrous inversion." Giles's action signals, as does his inversion of Isa's emotions, that the true monstrous inversion is war. Woolf's feminist message suggests that war represents all art, all creation the wrong way round.

Manresa applauds this action in Giles: "and what—she looked down—had he done with his shoes? They were bloodstained. Vaguely some sense that he had proved his valour for her admiration flattered her" (p. 107). Unconscious of the dire implication of his act, Isa mocks Giles and refers to him with tragic irony (in the myth, the son kills the mother) as the "Silly little boy, with blood on his boots" (p. 111).

Although Woolf shows Giles re-creating the inverted birth of patriarchy, she structures her novel on the matriarchal Eleusinian mysteries. In *Art and Ritual* Jane Harrison identifies the rites of Eleusis—the ritual celebration of the reunion between Persephone and Demeter—as the last stage before the final step that transformed Greek *dromena*, or ritual enactment, into drama. George E. Mylonas divides the Eleusinian mysteries into three parts: the *dromena*, in which the initiates celebrate the Persephone-Demeter reunion through music, song, and dance; the *legomena*, or "short liturgical statements and explanations"; and the *deiknymena*, or the showing of the sacred objects.²⁵

The sacred objects revealed in the last scene of the play are presumably "ourselves" as seen in the mirrors. Indeed, mirrors play a

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significant part between the acts of the novel and prepare the reader for this climax. But with their literal diminution, they gradually lose their mimetic power. Just as in the *mise en abîme* the image eventually becomes indiscernible, the mirror as a trope ceases to reflect. Instead Woolf offers a powerful mythic image reflective of the mythic power in nature: the lily pool.²⁶

In the early part of the novel, alone in her room, Isa gazes simultaneously at the triple image of herself and at life outside the glass. The "three separate versions" (p. 13) that she sees reflect her established roles as wife and mother and her newfound role as lover. The issue is not whether or not she is "in love" with the gentleman farmer, a man she hardly knows, but whether this fantasy will free her from the life and love that frame her or merely magnify her sense that "she too, in her webbed feet was entangled, by her husband, the stockbroker" (p. 5). Finally, she looks in the glass not for her own image, but rather "she groped, in the depths of the looking-glass, for a word" (p. 15). Unsuccessful, she turns from the reflection to order the luncheon fish.

The next significant mirror scene involves Lucy and William as they tour the house after luncheon and before the pageant. They stop in the room where Lucy was born: "Standing by the cupboard in the corner he saw her reflected in the glass. Cut off from their bodies, their eyes smiled, their bodiless eyes, at their eyes in the glass" (p. 71). The connection between Lucy and William is partial and disembodied. Though William feels healed by Lucy's mythic ties, he cannot disclose to her the truth about his sexuality. Despite the fact that after this moment "Words raised themselves and became symbolical" (p. 71), the words these characters find in the mirrors are inadequate.

Woolf satirizes this search for truth in the mirror when the performers force the audience to look at their own images at the end of the play. As the players move throughout the audience, they taunt them with "hand glasses, tin cans, scraps of scullery glass, harness room glass, and heavily embossed silver mirrors" (p. 185). They recite arbitrary words or phrases from the pageant. In this final coup de théâtre, Woolf ridicules the mirror metaphor by suggesting that the reflectors the players carry emit the "orts and fragments" (p. 189) they speak. These words travel through the audience as an incomprehensible display of sound. The genuine place for meditative reflections and the showing of the sacred objects becomes the lily pool.

While the terrace is the stage for the pageant, the area around the lily pool serves as the dressing room for the players. In Greek ritual the

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word *skenè*, from which we trace the English word stage, was not used to identify the raised platform on which the actors would perform, but the hut where they would change into ritual costume.²⁷ The area around the pond, I would suggest, then bears significance as another scene for action between the acts and as a place for metaphorical as well as literal change and transformation.

The narrator grants the pool a geological history—"Water, for hundreds of years, had silted down into the hollow, and lay there four or five feet deep over a black cushion of mud" (p. 43)—and a legendary past. Bart relates a tale to his luncheon guests about a woman who drowned herself in the pond and who continues to haunt the area. This mysterious Lady Ermyntrode calls to mind the painting of the unknown "lady." Both their stories evoke auras of silence and mystery. And, in that her spirit remains in the pond, Lady Ermyntrode is connected also with the fish that inhabit it:

Under the thick plate of green water, glazed in their self-centered world, fish swam—gold, splashed with white, streaked with black or silver. Silently they manoeuvred in their water world, poised in the blue patch made by the sky, or shot silently to the edge where the grass, trembling, made a fringe of nodding shadow. (p. 43)

The description of the fish recalls the language used to describe the vase and the painting. Like the maneuvering fish, the ancestress in the painting "led the eye up, down, from the curve to the straight, through glades of greenery and shades of silver" (p. 36). Like the smooth alabaster vase, the "glazed" fish live silently in a "self-centered world."

Throughout *Between the Acts* the fish function as a mysterious and complex version of ritual mana. *Websters'* defines mana as "impersonal supernatural force or power that may be concentrated in persons or objects and may be inherited, acquired, or conferred."²⁸ Harrison mentions three different means of acquiring mana: sacrifice, sacrament, and magic.²⁹ The fish that appear throughout *Between the Acts*, the ones that are caught by the men, ordered by Isa, delivered by Mitchell's boy, cooked by Mrs. Sands, eaten by the Olivers and their guests, and the fish that survive and inspire in the pool are all forms of mana associated with the female. As Erich Neumann notes: "We know how often the Goddess appears as an animal, as a cow and a swamp bird, as ewe and lioness. She also 'is' fish. She bears the fish's tail of the mermaids . . . she is associated with sacred fishpools. . . ."³⁰

Fish is established as mana acquired through sacrament when it is

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served as the Olivers' main meal. Catching fish, or its sacrificial attainment, is strictly a male enterprise. Lucy recalls traipsing after Bart in their youth on his fishing expeditions, yet being unable to fish herself: "Once, she remembered, he had made her take the fish off the hook herself. The blood had shocked her" (p. 21). Likewise, Isa is inept and relinquishes her right to fish: "her line had tangled; she had given over" (p. 48). She herself, like the salmon, is caught by Giles: "like a thick ingot of silver bent in the middle, the salmon had leapt, had been caught, and she had loved him" (p. 48). Thus the tangled lines and nets of patriarchy deny women access to the supernatural force or female mana within themselves.

To achieve creative consciousness, therefore, the women in *Between the Acts* employ magic, what Harrison calls "the individual, private, isolated"³¹ effort after contact with mana. When Lucy and Bart pass by the pond after the pageant finale, they stop to look in the water. But the mud conceals the fish. This mud is significant for, as Harrison reminds us, Plato saw those who lie in the mud as uninitiated into the mysteries.³² Though Bart claims that Lucy "ignored the battle in the mud" (p. 203), it is he who returns to the safety of his manor and the comfort of his dogs. As the actors put away their pageant costumes, Lucy remains alone by the lily pond "water searching, looking for fish" (p. 204). Slowly, through the combination of changing light, the flash and color of a fantail, and the intensity of her search, Lucy catches sight of the great carp through the mud and "retrieving some glint of faith from the grey waters, hopefully, without much help from reason, she followed the fish; the speckled, streaked, and blotched; seeing in that vision beauty, power, and glory in ourselves" (p. 205).

La Trobe is "like that carp" (p. 203). She "splash[es] . . . into the lily pool" (p. 64) only to rise again as the true priestess of this pageant in the "open-air cathedral" (p. 65). She unflinchingly fixes her eyes on creativity, knowing that "Only the roots beneath water were of use to her" (p. 64). Whereas the blood on Giles's shoes indicates involvement in the destructive act, the blood which "seemed to pour from [La Trobe's] shoes" (p. 180) is the self-inflicted wound of artistic frustration—"Miss La Trobe in her rage stubbed her toe against a root" (p. 94)—and reflects her complete immersion in the creative act.

The personal information about La Trobe, though sparse, is telling: "Since the row with the actress who had shared her bed and her purse, the need of drink had grown on her. And the horror and the terror of being alone" (p. 211). Her life is her art and in her creative process she "seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron,

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and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a re-created world" (p. 153). She is brewer of emotions, lover of women, seeker after roots: witch, lesbian, radical. Since she is like the great carp in the fishpool and only wants "coarse words descending like maggots through the waters" (p. 203) she is connected to the goddess who is fish. Erich Neumann tells us that "the magical caldron or pot is always in the hand of the female mana figure, the priestess, or, later, the witch."³³ La Trobe embodies all these powerful figures of female subversiveness. As such, she is an "outcast" (p. 211), a sterling example of Woolf's outsider whose eccentricity engenders her creativity. With "her abrupt manner" (p. 63), "her rapid decisions barked out in guttural accents" (p. 63), "her rather strong language" (p. 58), she is the driving force behind the pageant, the orchestrator of this parodic pastiche of plots and words.

Throughout the production nature colludes with La Trobe, saving her from artistic agony and endowing her with preternatural powers, as when the cows "annihilated the gap, bridged the distance; filled the emptiness and continued the emotion" (pp. 140-41). La Trobe rules over the pageant in the same way the priestess ruled over the ritual. As in the Eleusinian mysteries, rain plays an integral part. In the pageant, the sudden rain helps La Trobe to bridge the gap between the audience and the stage. At one moment, Isa looks up and the rain drops "trickled down her cheeks as if they were her own tears" (p. 180). If the audience cannot respond to the emotion La Trobe stirs in them, nature will simulate that response. And birds perform a prescient role for La Trobe as a creative artist. They make the mythic connections for Isa and Lucy and inspire the imagination of La Trobe.

Harrison writes that "of all living creatures, birds longest keep their sanctity."³⁴ In explaining their auspiciousness, Harrison points to the significance of etymology. She argues against the convention to translate the Greek *ὄρνις* whenever it has anything to do with the power of presage as omen. In this process, she writes, "All the colour and atmosphere of the word *ὄρνις* is thereby lost; lost because with us the word omen is no more a winged word. It is safer, I think, to translate *ὄρνις* as bird, and realise by a slight mental effort that to the Greek a 'bird' is ominous."³⁵

The same garrulous starlings who have appeared throughout English literature make a significant appearance at the end of the pageant. As La Trobe gathers her things, the starlings descend from nowhere. They land on the birch tree that has been her pillar and support throughout the play and, "In one flock they pelted it like so many winged stones" (p. 209). Woolf mellifluously combines the

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language of poetry and music—"birds syllabbling discordantly life, life, life, without measure" (p. 209)—to achieve a balance between meaning and meaninglessness. Did the birds merely whiz and buzz or did they exclaim "life, life, life"? Woolf's "winged stones" recall Harrison's "winged words" as the birds totter on the limb of language. The tree itself, eternally sacred to the goddess in all her emanations, is a figure for La Trobe, the creative artist. The birds reenact the flight of the imagination, its creative descent, and the burst of energy required to imbue sound with meaning. Thus Woolf reclaims the bird-sound stolen by Swinburne and Bart, and enables La Trobe to retell a mythic story.

After the starlings alight from the tree, La Trobe moves across the terrace/stage to lean against the birch tree and imagine her next play. She sets a scene but the words elude her. But La Trobe, like Lucy, does not shirk the battle in the mud. Unlike the characters who searched in the mirror, she searches for language in the mud. Later in the pub the images of the tree "pelted with starlings" (p. 212) and the fertile mud converge: "Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. . . . The mud became fertile. Words rose. . . . Words without meaning—wonderful words. . . . Suddenly the tree was pelted with starlings. She set down her glass. She heard the first words" (p. 212).

La Trobe's greatest desire moves beyond hearing these beautiful words, though that hearing is an important beginning. She longs "to write a play without an audience—the play" (p. 180). Though the desire is an apparent contradiction, she nearly achieves it by inscribing her audience in another play.

The opening scene of the novel occurs in the big room the evening before the performance. In it, Isa fantasizes escape from her marriage through an affair with the gentleman farmer. The scene depicts the modern dilemma of marriage, a twentieth-century vignette. Thus, it might function as the final act of La Trobe's pageant. In contrast, when Giles and Isa, alone in the big room at the end of the novel, speak—"Then the curtain rose. They spoke" (p. 219)—their words mark the beginning of a new play.

There are three authors of three separate endings to *Between the Acts*, each of whom could author this new play. By reuniting Isa and Giles, the narrator's ending recasts Isa as wife, mother, and lover:

Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night. (p. 219)

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And, as Madeline Moore remarks, this ending resembles "a fiction borrowed from the male imagination."³⁶ In fact Moore points out that the allusions suggest the writers of this ending are Conrad and Arnold. The narrator, then, would write a drama for a patriarchal stage.

Isa certainly would rebel against the dogfight ending of the novel. Her powerful epiphany occurs in the stable yard "where the dogs were chained" (p. 155). And she herself longs for a new part: "Surely it was time for someone to invent a new plot, or that the author came out from the bushes" (p. 215). Yet the final scene she imagines with Giles is too predictable: "She could hear in the dusk in their bedroom the usual explanation" (p. 110).

I would suggest that there is escape from these bleak endings. After setting the scene between Giles and Isa inside Pointz Hall, the narrator describes the outside: "It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks" (p. 219). This recalls the moment after the pageant when La Trobe, standing on the terrace, imagines her next play as a prehistoric scene: "'I should group them,' she murmured, 'here.' It would be midnight; there would be two figures, half concealed by a rock. The curtain would rise" (p. 210). Within the drama she envisions, La Trobe inscribes the narrator's: she stages her new play outside Pointz Hall, and her characters are the narrator's "dwellers in caves" (p. 219) watching the audience to the scene between Giles and Isa.

Jane Marcus suggests that La Trobe plans to rewrite Genesis.³⁷ I would argue that she intends to stage a matriarchal play. Her characters, perhaps, are the primitive celebrants who wait for Isa's release from the "heart of darkness," "the fields of night," to celebrate her springtime reunion with her mother/Goddess, her mythic origins, and to rewrite the plot—"She had screamed. She had hit him. . . . What then?" (p. 216)—to prevent the rape.

¹ B. H. Fussell calls attention to Woolf's equation of the dramatic and narrative modes and how each becomes an interval of the other. See "Woolf's Peculiar Comic World: *Between the Acts*," in *Virginia Woolf, Revaluation and Continuity: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Ralph Freedman (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), p. 267. J. Hillis Miller uses the term *mise en abîme* as a spatial and perceptual metaphor to distinguish properties of Woolf's language from properties of the visual world. See *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982), p. 205.

² Feminist readings of *Between the Acts* include: Jane Marcus, "Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny," in *Representation of Women in Fiction: Selected Papers from the*

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English Institute, 1981, eds. Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 60–97; Judy Little, "Festive Comedy in Woolf's *Between the Acts*," *Women and Literature*, Spring 1977, pp. 26–37; Madeline Moore, *The Short Season between Two Silences* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984), pp. 146–72; Nora Eisenberg, "Virginia Woolf's Last Words on Words: *Between the Acts* and 'Anon,'" in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jane Marcus (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1981), pp. 253–66; Sallie Sears, "Theater of War: Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*," in *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*, ed. Jane Marcus (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1983), pp. 212–35. Relevant essays, unavailable at the time of my writing, by Sandra Shattuck and J. Johnston are included in *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. Jane Marcus (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, forthcoming).

³ Rachel Blau DuPlessis discusses the way the dialectic between dominant and muted language in *Between the Acts* represents "perpetual 'betweenness' itself." See *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985), p. 176.

⁴ Marcus, "Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny," p. 62.

⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (New York: Harcourt, 1969), p. 3. Future references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

⁶ The quote suggests that Woolf relates this fear and hope to sexual relationships. But as a diffident artist, William subverts the political as well as the sexual male order. He is caught tragically between the sexes. On the other hand, La Trobe as the "outcast" is the outsider to the male order and can offer women genuine hope.

⁷ My reading is indebted to Susan Gubar's essay, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 73–93. Gubar brilliantly examines women writers' uses of images like Woolf's blank vase, arguing that, "female authors exploit [the trope of the blank page] to expose how woman has been defined symbolically in the patriarchy as a tabula rasa, a lack, a negation, an absence" (p. 89).

⁸ Jean Wyatt notes this allusion to Keats in "Art and Allusion in *Between the Acts*," *Mosaic*, 11, No. 4 (1978), 91–100.

⁹ For a thorough demonstration of Woolf's extensive use of Egyptian myth see Evelyn Haller, "Isis Unveiled: Virginia Woolf's Use of Egyptian Myth," in Marcus, ed., *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*, pp. 109–31.

¹⁰ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed. (Cleveland: World, 1922), and *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: Merlin Press, 1977).

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 1957), p. 17.

¹² Jane Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 44.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁴ Little, "Festive Comedy," p. 35.

¹⁵ Madeline Moore notes the irony in the patronymic origin of Lucy's surname. Swithin is the name of a bishop and patron saint of Winchester (*The Short Season*, p. 175). While Jean O. Love sees Lucy Swithin as approaching the great mother, most critics continue to identify her as a Christian. See *Worlds in Consciousness: Mythopoeic Thought in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Berkeley: Univ.

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of California Press, 1970). Though Evelyn Haller writes of Lucy as an important anti-madonna figure, she describes her as "the only Christian treated with sympathy throughout Woolf's work." See "The Anti-Madonna in the Work and Thought of Virginia Woolf," in *Virginia Woolf: Centennial Essays*, eds. Elaine K. Ginsberg and Laura Moss Gottlieb (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston, 1983), p. 102.

¹⁶ Erich Neumann identifies the cross as one of the "earliest symbols to emerge" in *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), p. 19.

¹⁷ Harrison, *Themis*, p. 84.

¹⁸ My source for this and other myths in my text is John Lemprière, *Lemprière's Classical Dictionary of Proper Names Mentioned in Ancient Authors Writ Large*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 479. Lemprière's is also Bart Oliver's reference in *Between the Acts*. See p. 25.

¹⁹ Marcus, "Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny," p. 62.

²⁰ Moore, *The Short Season*, p. 166.

²¹ Lemprière, *Classical Dictionary*, p. 518.

²² *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper, 1977), p. 139.

²³ Harrison, *Themis*, p. 267.

²⁴ M. Oldfield Howey, *The Encircled Serpent: A Study of Serpent Symbolism in All Countries and Ages* (New York: Arthur Richmond, 1955), p. 139.

²⁵ George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 261-74.

²⁶ Stephen Fox writes of the fishpool as the central symbol in *Between the Acts* as the lighthouse is the central symbol in *To the Lighthouse*. See "The Fish Pond as Symbolic Center in *Between the Acts*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 18 (1972), 467-73.

²⁷ Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, p. 142.

²⁸ *Websters' Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam, 1976).

²⁹ Harrison, *Themis*, p. 138.

³⁰ Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 276.

³¹ Harrison, *Themis*, p. 138.

³² Harrison, *Prolegomena*, p. 614.

³³ Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 288.

³⁴ Harrison, *Themis*, p. 113.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 98.

³⁶ Moore, *The Short Season*, p. 171.

³⁷ Marcus, "Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny," p. 90.

The Paradigmatic Mind: John Barth's *LETTERS*

MARJORIE GODLIN ROEMER

John Barth's place in the world of contemporary fiction seems more precarious now than it has been for many years. While no one disputes his enormous gifts, almost everyone seems to have some complaint about the way he has managed them. For some readers it is the self-indulgence of sophomoric humor in *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966) that irks; for others it is the super-involutéd preciosity of *Chimera* (1972) that distances; always it seems some sort of excess, books that are too long, too self-consciously postmodern, too insistent in their earthiness. Even his most recent attempt at the simpler, more accessible popular novel, *Sabbatical* (1982), failed to satisfy the critics, raising the familiar charges of overingeniousness, solipsism, and just bad taste.¹

Barth seems always to be pressing against the limits of his form, playing the line between tour de force and travesty, and while we may be engaged by his playfulness, we are discomfited by what is seriously at stake. Following the turns of his punning, analogizing wit, we begin to feel self-consciously anxious that we ourselves are his joke, our bewildered submersion in a network of self-canceling fictive codes his real subject.

Here, as in so many places, Barth himself may provide us with the best explanation for his practice. In his much-quoted, and much-misunderstood essay, "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967), he speaks about our period as an "age of ultimacies, in everything from weaponry to theology. . . ." He cites Borges and Beckett as writers whose work "reflects and deals with ultimacy, both technically and thematically, as, for example, *Finnegans Wake* does in its different manner."² It is this movement toward ultimacy that seems to be both the strength and the

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problem of Barth's work, the reason for its excess. Each successive novel carries its own premise to ultimate extension and exists in a relation of narrative argumentation with the preceding work, each being at once elaboration, critique, and alternative to the statement before. *Sabbatical*, the most recent work, seems in many ways a retrenchment, an attempt to popularize what achieves more dazzling exposition earlier, so that the seventh and immediately preceding work, *LETTERS* (1979), remains the most radical articulation of Barth's strategy, the recycling of the previous six works, a novel that, insisting on the simultaneity of past, present, and future, is designed to surround and overwhelm its reader.

But this self-conscious move toward spatialization is not new for Barth. Even a novel as early as *The End of the Road* (1958) invokes Lessing's ruminations on the spatial rendering of the temporal by making the statue of Laocoön its central icon. Later, *Giles Goat-Boy* offers a description of Max Spielman, that arch-synthesizer, as someone who "did not regard his past as a journey whose each new step left the earlier ones behind, but as the construction of a many-chambered house, in whose 'furnished' rooms he dwelt and tinkered while adding new ones."³ This fusion of various perspectives from the past into one atemporal whole is part of Barth's project, an ever-expanding elaboration of the way that the present aligns itself with the past, the real with the fictive. The stress of one caught in these intersecting synchronic perspectives is expressed by Bellerophon in *Chimera*; he complains, "I think I'm spooked. I'm full of voices, all mine, none me. . . ." He goes on to explain, "one has had visions of an order complex unto madness."⁴ Barth attests to this feature of his work himself. In a recent interview he remarked, "There are writers whose gift is to make terribly complicated things simple. But I know my gift is the reverse: to take relatively simple things and complicate them to the point of madness."⁵

The 772 pages of *LETTERS*, then, constitute Barth's most elaborate and sustained effort to render the full complexity and recursiveness of this vision. By reanimating five characters from the preceding novels, Barth allows all the patterns and devices of his earlier fiction to play off one another. Life is seen as reenactment, fiction as reenactment of reenactment, this fiction itself as reenactment of antecedent fictions. The novel, in its intricate recycling, becomes its own emblem of conscious life, an infinite regress of the intersections of past models and present events.

It is useful here to recall Barth's portrait of Menelaus and his battle to "exhaust reality's frightening guises." Barth calls the struggle with

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Proteus "a heroic enterprise, with salvation as its object."⁶ *LETTERS* is clearly Barth's own battle with the great Shape-Shifter, an enterprise no less perilous or exalted.

As a gloss by Barth on Barth, the novel reveals much about the earlier works, frankly indicating Barth's identity with all his earlier protagonists. Each character here takes on full three-dimensional status as a separate history and separate consciousness, yet Barth very clearly lets us know that each is a piece of himself. In the author's second letter, addressed to Whom It May Concern, he describes "three concentric dreams of waking." The letter begins: "I woke half tranced, understanding where I was but not at once who, or why I was there. . . ."⁷ This line is repeated in variant form three times in this letter and several other times in the book. Each time it introduces another Barth: first Ambrose Mensch, identified here as a "dreamer of sub-sea-level dreams," then the Burlingame/Cook self, "all bravura, intrigue and derring-do," and third, "faint-bumbling B, most shadowy of all . . . a blind, lame vatic figure," Jerome Bray.

This introductory letter serves to affirm the splitting and projection which are certainly part of the creation of this fiction. The point is amply confirmed by Barth himself in an interview published in *Granta*. He says there, "Not only is Madame Bovary Flaubert, but Flaubert is Madame Bovary. That's certainly true in the case of my characters."⁸ He goes on to agree that Ambrose Mensch is a kind of alter ego, but that Todd Andrews is the character he feels closest to: "there, but for the grace of God, go I."⁹ Jacob Horner is not so overtly owned as fictive projection of self, yet his obsessive patterning impulse is unmistakably a part of Barth and of this novel. The final projection is the singular Lady Amherst, Barth's new creation for this work. As symbolic embodiment of the tradition of belles lettres, Lady Amherst is significantly joined with Ambrose Mensch, that avant-garde formalist part of Barth himself, but in her own right Lady Amherst is a wise, witty, lusty, and fairly independent female; perhaps she is Barth's response to that feminist criticism that has seen in his previous fiction so little in the way of strong female models. In any case, the novel presents a world of recorded voices, each owned, in this most self-reflexive of fictions, as one of the author's possible selves.

In our assessment of Barth, his quest for ultimacy and the risks it imposes must be considered; *LETTERS*, Barth's most systematic approach to ultimacy, seems the legitimate place to begin, for it examines the exhaustion of the possibilities set in motion by all Barth's preceding works. Haunted by Dante's, "Nel mezzo del cammin . . . ,"

this work is Barth's journey through his multiple fictive pasts toward reinscription in the tradition of letters; it is clearly "a heroic enterprise, with salvation as its object," as it plumbs the depths of postmodern self-consciousness and the hazards of telling tales in a time of narrative apostasy. It is now fashionable to consider any attempt to view art as religion to be an archaic preoccupation of the age of high modernism, transcendence having become, in our enlightened time, suspect and reactionary. For this reason it is particularly arresting to see how one of our most preeminently postmodern practioners (the author of both "The Literature of Exhaustion" and "The Literature of Replenishment,"¹⁰ two essays that have most clearly situated and named the postmodern undertaking) attempts to address both the contemporary anguish of the problematized word and the age-old imperative of art, to erect what Barth once referred to as "shores against silence,"¹¹ created forms that stave off the abyss.

LETTERS casts all of Barth's former projections of self in replaying, reliving, reshaping, their individual but composite past. The circumstances which bring all these reenactments together are, first, Barth's epistolary efforts to enlist the various characters' permission to serve as models for his projected novel *LETTERS*, and, second, the character Reg Prinz's filming of *Frames*, the cinematic version of Barth's works, both those to be written in the future and those already completed. These two projects bring the disparate characters together and also serve to cross boundaries of temporality and fictionality. Barth is soliciting permission for appearance in a projected novel which we are already reading; the film includes sequences which derive from this novel, supposedly not yet conceived. These letters endow the characters of these fictions with purported actual existence independent of their inclusion in the fictional works. These circumstances and the welter of coincidence and repetition which serves to connect the lives of Cooks, Andrews, Macks, Horner, et al., trap us in a maze of devious design. The representation of life is convoluted, riddled with ironic congruence, but nowhere is life independent of art. We perceive everything through documentary "frames," letters, novels, films; each perceiver is actor and reenactor, shaper of what he sees.

The idea is not new for Barth; it is the substance of all his previous works, but here it is presented in such definitive detail as to constitute an exhaustive demonstration of the case, the author's total oeuvre as argument. This work thus anatomizes narrative structures with the same epistemological rigor that Joyce turned on language itself. In microcosm and macrocosm it is the affirmation of *letters*, signs, the

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tangible marks of human experience given form. Letters comprise the single letters of the alphabet, the acrostic of the subtitle, the atom of literary composition; additionally, they refer to the letters exchanged among the various writers, documents of lives lived; finally, they refer to the domain of belles lettres, the tradition of literature as it shapes and orders experience. Where voice itself was the focal point for *Lost in the Funhouse*, here the voice indited as printed word, the inscribed sign, is the issue. As Ambrose Mensch now commits himself to the "great tradition," Barth, too, reinscribes himself in the tradition of the printed word, despite all avant-garde pressures to junk it.

For Barth the tradition of letters which shapes his consciousness comes to be more and more the world of his own letters. While we are constantly directed to what Thackeray, "that old cheater," said (p. 193), or to *Don Quixote* as point of reference for the intersection of the real and the fictive, we are ever more insistently committed to the world of John Barth's psyche. Every character here is either reading or writing Barth's works. His initials dominate the text: Jerome Bray, Burlingame, Joel Barlow, Joseph Brant, Jean Blaque, Joseph Bacri. *B* is "the instrument of creation, the mother of letters and of the world" (p. 328), just as the bee so often in Barth represents the mellifluous voice and the honey of generation. Self-reflexivity carried to its limit, the novel is a celebration of its creating mind, and Barth does not shy away from the ultimate arrogance of the author playing God in the universe of his creation. In the godless, post-absurdist world of the late twentieth century, Barth is calmly invoked as "our Author."

The scope of this novel is, thus, at once expanded and contracted. It assays total inclusiveness at the same time that it addresses most directly the mind of John Barth alone. In some sense, it is Barth talking to himself, plumbing the depths of his imaginative processes and the interplay of forces that shape experience for him. As Barth communes with himself and sifts through the metaphors of his past works, he offers us his imagination as paradigm for consciousness. The journey he undertakes in *LETTERS* is the spiraling, entangled journey back through reenactments of his multiple pasts toward new understandings of his present and new directions for his future. Like all heroes, he undertakes the solitary quest for the edification of a community. As Dante undertakes, in his own person, a journey of *our* lives ("Midway in our life's journey, I went astray"¹²), Barth journeys deeply into the terrain of his particular obsessions to chart a portrait of more general import.

In thirteenth-century Florence, Dante had a series of traditions to

support the universality of his vision: a language, a religion, and a method of thought.¹³ The centrality of his allegorical vision, the relation of his personal pilgrimage to the general experience of man, was corroborated by all his means of knowledge. Everything he knew and experienced affirmed the correspondence. For Barth, at "this hour of the world" all available means of knowing affirm fragmentation. The attempt to forge a central myth is a personal, isolated struggle. No general truths stand. For the twentieth century, any effort to erect a shared experience is, in some sense, synthetic and must rest on premises of discontinuity and relativity. In such a context the individual quest for order and meaning in the face of chaos takes on an increasingly idiosyncratic and willful character. Nonetheless, this particular heroic struggle is the artist's ultimate lot, and, as Barth has said, salvation is its object. The religious nature of this enterprise surfaces in a variety of ways in Barth's works; allusions to the Lord's Prayer, the Catechism, and the Revised New Syllabus underline it. For, finally, no matter what the current disclaimers, the order with which we invest our perceptions does constitute a religious view, a myth, or what Frank Kermode might name a "concord-fiction,"¹⁴ that affirms value.

The prime tenet of Barth's dogma is the supremacy of the structuring mind; a kind of self-reflexivity emerges as faith. This makes of *LETTERS* a supreme testament to the belief in the ordering, shaping capacities of the human mind, a celebration, like Dante's, of the sanctity of language as both evidence and means of man's access to divine powers. It also makes of *LETTERS* a peculiarly self-indulgent exercise in literary narcissism. For the reader who has not accepted Barth as paradigmatic consciousness and who is not willing to invest himself so fully in the labyrinths of Barth's personal dialogue, the work remains self-enclosed, a man talking, ever more exclusively, to himself.

The problem obviously troubles Barth. *Lost in the Funhouse* resounds with this plaint. *Chimera* and *LETTERS* address it as well. Barth has said, "Everything we do in art is likely to turn out to be either prophecy or exorcism, whatever its other intentions."¹⁵ One might well view *LETTERS* as the final, extended attempt to exorcise the demon of solipsism which haunts the writer's activity. The novel is, after all, a relentless analysis of letters as the frames through which we know. Its characters desperately write their way through life, questioning at every turn their need to write and what it signifies. What emerges more clearly in this work than in any of Barth's previous fiction is the extent to which these letters are an attempt to make one's peace with generational conflict. Almost every character in this book seeks

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communication with either parent or child, or both. Todd Andrews continues to address himself to the father he has never understood, while he reaches out to influence the son he never had. A. B. Cook VI is enmeshed in the family codes for untangling the agon of generational conflict. Mad Jerome Bray most explicitly articulates the fact that all his works are "not mere novels, but documents disguised in novel format for the purpose of publicly broadcasting private messages to our parents" (p. 36).

All these letters finally come to be ways of affirming one's place in relation to the generations on either side, ways of affirming identity as both disruption and continuity. Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* is instructive here. Bloom has had much to say about "intra-poetic relationships as parallels of family romance,"¹⁶ that is, the extent to which strong writers must defend against what most influences them because it is, paradoxically, what most threatens them. As sons must, in some measure, repudiate fathers, so authors must separate themselves from what has nurtured and shaped their lives as poets. This theme is the most central one within the novel. Explicit in the events of the life of A. B. Cook, its relevance to all aspects of the work is continually underscored. Cook perceives at some point: "that I myself, not my father, am the parent I must refute" (p. 280). And, later in the same letter, discussing Rousseau and Goethe, he speaks of the "rejection or transcension of conventional forms," and specifically of Goethe's work on metamorphosis in plants: "I would discover that an essay on the forms of plants can illumine the storm & stress, so to speak, betwixt certain parents & their children, or innovative artists & the conventions of their arts" (p. 283).

What these passages confirm is the acute significance of generational conflict here as means for addressing Barth's anguished need to define his place as artist, to achieve his postmodernist rapprochement with his nineteenth-century grandparents and twentieth-century parents. The problem is, quite properly, posed by the quintessential Romantics, for it is here that the issue of the individual and the tradition becomes most seriously problematic, evolution now seen as dynamic and conflictive. Dante, too, seriously addresses his filial relation to Virgil in order to define the place where Virgil's influence within him becomes separated from his own imperatives, but the problems of individuation in his age seem markedly less acute. As Bloom says of Shakespeare, he "belongs to the giant age before the flood, before the anxiety of influence became central to poetic consciousness."¹⁷

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In Barth, the voice which most insistently asserts past influence is the voice of Stephen Dedalus invoking his mythic father, "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead."¹⁸ Todd Andrews repeatedly cries out, "Old Father" (p. 459); Jerome Bray invokes, "Lost Mother, old artifice, key to the key: R.S.V.P!" (p. 427); and Ambrose Mensch finally says:

Just as the Hero (at IF6) finally terminates his tasks by exterminating his taskmaster and (IIF6) discovers in what had been his chiefest adversary his truest ally, so such an "artist," at the Axis Mundi or Navel of the World, might find himself liberated—Old Self! Old Other! Yours Truly!—from such painful, essential correspondences as ours. (p. 651)

This looming, shadowed presence, at once father, mother, and internalized self, is always the voice of the prototypal modernist *Künstlerroman*; it is Joyce, speaking through Stephen, of the post-Romantic stance of the subjective, self-emblemizing artist. When Barth is asked to name his models, he seldom mentions Joyce, yet it appears that it is this influence which he must modify in the attempt to distinguish his personal voice (or voices).

In discussing the artist's relation to tradition, Barth observed:

I sympathize with a remark attributed to Saul Bellow, that to be technically up to date is the least important attribute of a writer, though I would have to add that this least important attribute may be nevertheless essential.¹⁹

Certainly for Barth it has been essential to graph very precisely his own practices in their relation to what has come before and in relation to other available options. The deconstructive axiom, "Every text implies a countertext," is a statement made explicitly in *LETTERS* and one which informs Barth's practice throughout. This play of intertextuality is Barth's abiding interest. From *The Sot-Weed Factor* on, we are acutely aware of each character, each event, each statement as a moment situated in an intricate network of forces. Nothing exists in stasis; every observation is modified by an intersection of models for perceiving it. In *LETTERS*, Joyce and Dante supply two named countertexts, and they define specific currents of influence. However, every narrative move resonates with less clearly situated countermoves which the multi-voiced perspective of the novel articulates. Dominick LaCapra defines a text in a way which may help us to establish Barth's "up to dateness" in this regard:

What is meant by the term "text"? It may initially be seen as a situated use of language marked by a tense interaction between

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mutually implicated yet at times contestatory tendencies. On this view, the very opposition between what is inside and what is outside texts is rendered problematic, and nothing is seen as being purely and simply inside or outside texts. Indeed the problem becomes one of rethinking the concepts of "inside" and "outside" in relation to processes of interaction between language and the world.²⁰

As Barth's earlier works attest, this breakdown between inside and outside, the Moebius strip problem, the blurring of boundaries, is at the heart of his enterprise. He is intent on showing us the crosscurrents which inhere in every statement, every experience, every perception, in our lives as in his texts.

Two issues which LaCapra introduces in *Rethinking Intellectual History: Text, Context, and Language* are particularly relevant to *LETTERS*. The first is the notion of history itself seen as a process of "iteration with alteration—a process for which language provides one important model."²¹ This is precisely what Barth takes on in this seventh and summative text. The action of the novel presents a history which agglomerates seven individual histories which trace public and private histories for generations. Language is at once part of history itself and the means by which history is imparted. Every telling changes both the teller and what he tells. Yet these various tellings constitute, for us, a history against which we continue to recount. And what we recount are reenactments, repetitions with variation. This involution of the narrative process is the problematic of the twentieth-century author and the excruciating burden of influence with which he struggles. No wonder that Proteus becomes a favorite figure.

The second issue is LaCapra's unanswered question about the evaluation of greatness:

Is the judgment of greatness at times related to the sense that certain works both reinforce tradition and subvert it, perhaps indicating the need for newer traditions that are more open to disconcerting modes of questioning and better able to withstand the recurrent threat of collapse?²²

This characteristic of what LaCapra elsewhere calls "inner contestation" is what Barth achieves most stunningly in *LETTERS* and what has been evidently a goal from the start of his career. No one more consistently invokes past models than Barth, and no one more consistently subjects them to deidealization than he. Whether or not this is the ultimate mark of greatness, it is clearly a value for deconstructive critics as for this deconstructive novelist.

From an intellectual standpoint, this is sophisticated, complex, and

radical practice. Barth is very much in the mainstream of current critical theory when he opens within his texts a space for claims and counterclaims and sets free before us a dialogized world without any attempt at reductive closure. The stance implies a freedom, a richness, and an openness of vision that animate his fiction. There is, however, another side to this capacious, noncensoring largesse that seems operative in Barth's fictional practice and may even inform some of the critical postures he incorporates. There is a clear effort to anticipate and neutralize any possible critical attack. If one has fully dialogized every position, no flank is left unprotected. As Barth said, in an interview, "it's kind of fun to be Brooks and Warren to one's own books."²³ Surely no author has gone further than he in supplying all the possible analyses of his own texts. An even more significant feature of this self-protective impulse emerges in the following statement:

Well, one way to write in the grand style, if you want to, is with your tongue halfway in your cheek. Then you're free to do things that would be sentimental and unbearable if your tracks weren't covered by a certain degree of irony. Farce and burlesque can cover your tracks in a similar fashion; no one nowadays can write Greek drama, but if you want to get at some of the Sophoclean tragic spirit, one way to approach it, perhaps, is by throwing up a masquerade of burlesque.²⁴

Much of Barth's brilliance appears, in fact, to be an effort to "throw up a masquerade," to cover his tracks and protect the serious and the passionate from the corrosive stare of our ironic and critical times.

What emerges, finally, is a created world hedged by intelligence, erudition, and sophistication. It is a space where language may indeed speak of itself fatally, disempowering its own projections as it proceeds. Characteristically, Barth anticipates us here, too. In this novel Ambrose Mensch's account of the "Perseid" (for which he claims authorship) explains that it is meant to describe "the transcension of paralyzing self-consciousness to productive self-awareness" (p. 652). Here, indeed, is the core of the problem. Paralyzing self-consciousness is one significant aspect of the "*felt* ultimacy" of our age. What is not clear, finally, is whether Barth succeeds in the hoped-for transcension to productive self-awareness; the question still remains open whether or not full human commitment is jeopardized by the sustained hedging of dialogized speech.

To pose this question and not answer it may seem irresponsible, both in the critic and the novelist, yet I would argue that it is the exhaustive exploration of such tensions that art allows us and that

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ultimately moves us toward fuller possession of the complexities of our circumstances. Self-reflexivity is a feature of modern consciousness, just as commercial culture might be said to be more and more the landscape in which we perceive. Novelists can reflect this back to us in such sharply etched images that we experience our circumstances in new intensity; the represented image is both shaped and distanced, and by these means made more immediately available to us than our own diffuse and defense-laden experience. The problem wrestled with here, ultimate value and commitment in the world of the self-conscious, infinitely regressive text, is the problem played out in much of our current academic discourse. It is the problem raised by Dan Latimer's recent response to Fredric Jameson's article, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." While Jameson sets out in comprehensive detail the effect of "the dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects,"²⁵ Latimer faults Jameson for retreating into a dialectic that evades true moral commitment.²⁶ There is, on the one hand, the experience of what Jameson names "postmodern hyperspace"²⁷ and, on the other hand, there is the categorical imperative to take a moral position, however involuted and sophisticated the manipulations of the cultural superstructure in which we operate.

Some of our most interesting contemporary novelists have chosen to represent within their fictions these dense confusions of the postmodern world, both the problem of the decentered subject and the problem of a world no longer comprehensible: the bankruptcy of the interpretive function in a system so involuted. E. L. Doctorow is one such author; Geoffrey Galt Harpham has recently delineated some of the complex ways in which Doctorow explores technological systems both as metaphor and medium in which the modern self functions.²⁸ Pynchon, Gaddis, and McElroy are other contemporary fictionists who wrestle with characters immersed in networks of relationships so dense as to be incomprehensible. A session at the 1984 MLA conference in Washington named a new genre, "meganovels," those sprawling works which reject unity and portray the novel as "disintegrated encyclopedia."²⁹ There is no question that these works strain and frustrate their readers, in fact often alienate their potential audience, but they do, in their several fashions, both thematically and technically, represent the current crisis in representation.

Barth has spoken about a modern condition of "felt ultimacies." It

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is this case which he puts before us so exhaustively, unflinchingly, and with such imaginative fecundity. He, at least, undertakes the requisite Dantean journey to confront the frozen, paralyzing depths in his own person. Whether one faults Barth for his excesses or not, his work affirms an honest commitment to pursue the implications of his themes to their ultimate ends. Here in *LETTERS* he anatomizes the modern imagination to its ninth circle of perplexity, bearing witness with his own consciousness to the "hard and perilous track"³⁰ of late-twentieth-century self-reflexivity, and thus telling once again in our time the "terror that cannot be told."³¹

¹ See Michael Wood, "A Metaphoric Novel of the Sea," *New York Times Book Review*, 20 June 1982, p. 1. Paul Gray, *Time*, 31 May 1982, p. 78. James Wolcott, *New York Review of Books*, 10 June 1982, p. 14.

² John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," *Atlantic*, Aug. 1967, p. 30.

³ John Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy or, The New Revised Syllabus* (New York: Fawcett Crest Books, 1967), p. 125.

⁴ John Barth, *Chimera* (New York: Fawcett Crest Books, 1972), p. 154.

⁵ John Barth, "The Art of Fiction LXXXVI," *Paris Review*, 27, No. 95 (Spring 1985), 144-49.

⁶ Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," p. 34.

⁷ John Barth, *LETTERS* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1979), p. 46. All subsequent references are to this edition, and are cited parenthetically in the text.

⁸ Heidi Ziegler, "An Interview with John Barth," *Granta*, NS 1, No. 2 (Autumn 1979), 172.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁰ Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," pp. 29-34; and "The Literature of Replenishment," *Atlantic*, Jan. 1980, pp. 65-71.

¹¹ John Barth, "Hawkes and Barth Talk about Fiction," *New York Times Book Review*, 1 Apr. 1979, p. 31.

¹² *The Inferno*, trans. John Ciardi (New York: New American Library, 1954). All subsequent references to Dante are from this translation.

¹³ T. S. Eliot, "Dante," in *Selected Essays of T. S. Eliot*, new ed. (New York: Harcourt, 1950).

¹⁴ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 80.

¹⁵ Ziegler, "An Interview with John Barth," p. 172.

¹⁶ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁸ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking, 1969), p. 253.

¹⁹ Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," p. 30.

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²⁰ Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Text, Context, and Language* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983), p. 26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²³ Alan Prince, "An Interview with John Barth," *Prism* (Sir George Williams University), Spring 1968, p. 56.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁵ Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, 146 (1984), 84. This article is the most balanced, useful account of the postmodern circumstance that I have read to date.

²⁶ Dan Latimer, "Jameson and Post-modernism," Comment, *New Left Review*, 148 (1984), 116-27. I do not agree with Latimer's charge, but think it raises the kind of controversy necessarily attendant on the problems we confront here.

²⁷ Jameson, "Postmodernism," p. 83.

²⁸ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "E. L. Doctorow and the Technology of Narrative," *PMLA*, 100, No. 1 (1985), 81-95.

²⁹ Susan Strehle, "Gravity's Rainbow, LETTERS, and the Forms of Megafiction," A Special Session, The Meganovel, MLA Convention, Washington, D.C., 29 Dec. 1984. In this session Elaine B. Safer and Frederick R. Karl also developed the concept of the meganovel, Prof. Safer further exploring the term, encyclopedic narrations, with its reference to disparate collections of data, facts which seem to be arbitrarily arranged and are intended to be viewed in their discrete contexts of traditional meanings.

³⁰ *The Inferno*, trans. Ciardi, p. 39. Canto II.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 283. Canto XXXIV.

“What fools we were!”: Virginia Woolf’s “A Society”

SUSAN DICK

Virginia Woolf’s short story “A Society” was out of print for over sixty years. Written in 1920 and published in 1921 in *Monday or Tuesday*, Woolf’s only collection of short stories, “A Society” was excluded by Leonard Woolf from *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* (1944), the collection he published after her death in 1941, because, he explained, she had decided not to include it in the collection of stories she had proposed bringing out in 1942.¹ I suspect that Virginia Woolf wished not to reprint “A Society” primarily for three reasons. First, unlike the other seven stories in *Monday or Tuesday*, “A Society” does not reflect the innovations she was making in narrative technique. It resembles *Night and Day* (1919), the long novel that she later called her “exercise in the conventional style” (LIV, 231), far more than it does the experimental works that surround it in the collection.² Secondly, in 1940, when a new collection was being discussed, she probably felt that she had explored the feminist views presented in the story far more extensively and effectively in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) than in this early story. A third reason may be that aspect of the story which, from our perspective, contributes enormously to its interest: the extent to which Woolf reflects in “A Society” with striking immediacy the historical and cultural context in which it was written.³

In the opening paragraphs of “Phyllis and Rosamond” (an early story which Woolf never published), the narrator presents herself as a cultural historian. “We intend to look as steadily as we can,” she writes, “at a little group, which lives at this moment (the 20th June, 1906); and seems for some reasons which we will give, to epitomise the qualities of many.” The two “obscure” young women who “are condemned to be

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what in the slang of the century is called 'the daughters at home,' " give her "excellent material" for her "enquiry" into the lives of women whose stories have not yet, she believes, been adequately told (*CSF*, pp. 17-18). In all of her subsequent explorations into the lives of women, whether obscure or not, fictional or real, Woolf will always place them within the historical and cultural context which shapes their lives and which, through the course of the narrative, most come to see more clearly. In "A Society," as in a number of her other fictional works, including "Phyllis and Rosamond," "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn," "Memoirs of a Novelist," *Night and Day*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Orlando*, *The Years*, and *Between the Acts*, that context is especially prominent. My interest here is in the ways that Woolf uses in "A Society" specific historical events and draws upon contemporary art and literature in her portrayal of the inquiry undertaken by this society of young women. The story spans one of the most important decades in the twentieth century, 1909 to 1919. World War I, which is commemorated by a silent five-year hiatus in the story, grimly clarifies the implications of their discoveries. The cultural context in which her characters live is equally important, for it provides Woolf with the motive for her story and with a rich source of allusion and humor.

A consideration of these aspects of "A Society" will also highlight some of the ways that it anticipates *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, the two later nonfictional works in which she most thoroughly expresses her "ambiguous relationship to a cultural heritage that simultaneously supported and excluded" her,⁴ a relationship that the women of "A Society" discover is part of their heritage, too.

I suspect that one reason for the immediacy with which the historical and cultural context of "A Society" is presented stems from its having been conceived as a response to Arnold Bennett's book *Our Women: Chapters on the Sex Discord*, which received considerable attention in the press following its publication on September 23, 1920. On September 26, Woolf noted in her diary that she was considering "making up a paper upon Women, as a counterblast to Mr. Bennett's adverse views reported in the papers."⁵ These reports must not only have angered Woolf, but depressed her as well. The paragraph in which she contemplates her "counterblast" contains a moving description of a loss of self-confidence. She has been working steadily on *Jacob's Room* for two months, she notes, and T. S. Eliot's recent visit, during which he praised *Ulysses*, has left her "listless. . . . He said nothing—but I reflected how what I'm doing is probably being better done by Mr. Joyce." The same paragraph ends with the following comment:

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"Perhaps at the bottom of my mind, I feel that I'm distanced by L. [eonard] in every respect" (DII, p. 69). A consideration of the effects of discouragement upon the mind of the female artist, a central topic in *A Room of One's Own*, will figure obliquely in "A Society" as well (RO, p. 80).

If she was at all hesitant to mount her "counterblast," Desmond MacCarthy's comments on Bennett's book in the *New Statesman* of October 2 clearly provided further incentive. Writing as "Affable Hawk" in his "Books in General" feature, MacCarthy devoted nearly two columns to *Our Women*. While he found some of Bennett's generalizations superficial, he agreed wholeheartedly with Bennett's assertion that "women are inferior to men in intellectual power, especially in that kind of power which is described as creative. Certainly," MacCarthy added, "that fact stares one in the face." At the end of his review, he mentioned two other books about women: Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* and Orlo Williams' lighthearted and condescending *The Good Englishwoman*. His brief summary of Weininger's distasteful book included the gratuitous information that Weininger, as well as two women who read his book, committed suicide.⁶

The following week Virginia Woolf's response to this provocative review appeared in the *New Statesman*.⁷ In her letter Woolf takes issue with Bennett's and Affable Hawk's assumption that women are intellectually inferior to men and with their further conviction that neither education nor liberty will alter this fact. How "does Affable Hawk account for the fact which stares me, and I should have thought any other impartial observer, in the face," she asks, "that the seventeenth century produced more remarkable women than the sixteenth, the eighteenth than the seventeenth, and the nineteenth than all three put together?" The comparison of the advance in intellectual power of women with that of men is, she adds, "not in the least one that inclines me to suicide. . . ." She concludes her letter by suggesting that if Affable Hawk "sincerely wishes to discover a great poetess" he should consider Sappho. "Naturally," she says, "I cannot claim to know Greek as Mr. Bennett and Affable Hawk know it, but I have often been told that Sappho was a woman, and that Plato and Aristotle placed her with Homer and Archilochus among the greatest of their poets." She challenges Bennett or Affable Hawk to name fifty male poets who are Sappho's superiors. If they can do so, she promises "as an act of that submission which is so dear to my sex, not only to buy their works but, so far as my faculties allow, to learn them by heart" (DII, pp. 339-40).

Affable Hawk's response to Woolf's letter appeared beneath it. Not

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surprisingly, he remained unchanged in his views and he now marshaled what he felt was further evidence to support them. He questioned Sappho's reputation which rests, he argued, on a few fragments of poems and on "her leap from the Leucadian promontory" for which, he says, she became herself a theme for poetry. And since Sappho's time, what has prevented other women, he asked, from becoming major poets, musicians, painters, philosophers, or scientists, since the conditions of their lives have been no less conducive to such achievements than those of men. "Granted the intellect and a garden of peas," he says with wonderful complacency, "and a monk may become a Mendel."⁸

In her response, published on October 16, Woolf takes issue with each of Affable Hawk's assertions, and in doing so begins to develop an argument that will be central to *A Room of One's Own*. After contrasting the conditions which enabled Sappho to express her gifts with those that inhibited Ethel Smyth in the expression of hers, she states:

It seems to me indisputable that the conditions which make it possible for a Shakespeare to exist are that he shall have had predecessors in his art, shall make one of a group where art is freely discussed and practised, and shall himself have the utmost of freedom of action and experience. Perhaps in Lesbos, but never since, have these conditions been the lot of women.

She is arguing as she will again in *A Room of One's Own* for the recognition of the intellectual traditions to which women belong, for the encouragement knowledge of that context will give them, and for the need for education and freedom so that they may continue to develop those traditions. All "activity of the mind should be so encouraged," she says near the end of her letter, "that there will always be in existence a nucleus of women who think, invent, imagine, and create as freely as men do, and with as little fear of ridicule and condescension." Affable Hawk's last words on the subject suggest he is condescendingly conciliatory, but not converted. "If the freedom and education of women is [sic] impeded by the expression of my views," he wrote, "I shall argue no more" (DII, pp. 341-42).

The links between this exchange of sharply opposed views and "A Society" seem to me strong. The group of young women who form themselves into a society "for asking questions" is like the "nucleus of women" whom Woolf describes in her letter. The questions they set out to ask invert Bennett's and Affable Hawk's assumptions, for these women want to know if *men* have produced anything of high value. In her firmly controlled letters, Woolf makes no effort to disguise her

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vehement disagreement with Bennett and Affable Hawk. She uses an effective combination of direct statement, sarcasm, and ironic humor to express it. This exchange obviously made her aware of the kind of reception a story that explored these ideas would be given by male reviewers. Her decision to tell "A Society" from the point of view of Cassandra may reflect in part a desire to conceal herself behind the voice of another. While some of the characters are blunt in their judgments of the failures of men, Cassandra tends not to impose an evaluation on her report of the society's deliberations, but rather to let her readers draw their own conclusions about the discoveries the society makes.⁹

The probable links between "A Society" and *Our Women* may also help to illuminate the special qualities of this story as a story. Its overt didactic thrust makes it unlike any other work of fiction that Virginia Woolf wrote. In its didacticism, its playfulness, its satirical view of contemporary society, and in its use of characters who are for the most part indistinguishable from one another and whose function it is to express ideas rather than personalities, "A Society" has affinities with the fable and the novel of ideas. It also resembles some of Woolf's own essays in which fictional situations serve as the occasion for the discussion of ideas. In particular, the narrative method of "A Society" anticipates that of *A Room of One's Own*, in which we are addressed by an "I" who insists that we think of her as fictional: "call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please," she says, "it is not a matter of any importance" (*RO*, p. 8), and in which this speaker's reflections on the place of women in society grow out of particular scenes and events. However, unlike *A Room of One's Own*, "A Society" does tell a story, and it tells it, as we shall see, by drawing on a variety of literary conventions.

In the opening scene of "A Society," a group of young women, whom Woolf might later have called "the daughters of educated men" (*TG*, p. 10 ff), while "sitting one day after tea," begin "as usual to praise men" (*CSF*, p. 118). The subtle irony of Cassandra's casual phrase, "as usual," strikes the note heard throughout the story. These young women are about to begin questioning the "usual" assumptions of their society. In doing this, they are unknowingly enacting the process through which, according to Susanne K. Langer, new societies evolve. "Every society meets a new idea with its own concepts, its own tacit, fundamental way of seeing things; that is to say *with its own questions*, its peculiar curiosity."¹⁰ The heuristic process that begins here grows out of their curiosity about the extent to which the production of "good

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people and good books," which they assume to be the primary aim of life, is accomplished by men.

In this opening scene, Poll, who will inherit the fortune left her by her father only after she has read all the books in the London Library, challenges their complacent praise of men. " 'Books,' she cried, rising to her feet and speaking with an intensity of desolation which I shall never forget, 'are for the most part unutterably bad!' " To prove her point, she reads them some passages of prose and then of poetry. The "verbose, sentimental foolery" of some of the verses prompts one of them to say, " 'It must have been written by a woman' " (CSF, p. 119). But her assumption, it turns out, is wrong. They have, as Poll ironically observes when Shakespeare, Milton, and Shelley are held up as examples of men who wrote good books, " 'been well taught.' " Thus the premise on which Woolf bases her story is that these young women know as little about the social, political, and artistic achievements of men as most men, to judge from Arnold Bennett and Affable Hawk, know about those of women. They are just beginning to realize that their assumptions are those of the patriarchal society they have grown up in; the society they now create among themselves will both expose those assumptions and challenge them.

Having established their "society for asking questions" and having resolved to bear no children until they have found some answers, they spend the next five years investigating men's achievements in the military, law, scholarship, painting, and literature. Woolf makes comic use of her own part in the *Dreadnought* hoax by having Rose report how she dressed herself as an Ethiopian prince and boarded one of His Majesty's ships. Like those who took part in the actual hoax, Rose's masquerade is partially discovered. The scene of the Captain's visit to her (she is now disguised as a gentleman) conflates and elaborates two events described by Woolf in the amusing account of the *Dreadnought* hoax that she wrote in 1940. The six light taps that Rose receives on "the behind" (CSF, p. 120), meant to avenge the Navy's honor, recall the "two ceremonial taps" given by the officers to the bemused Duncan Grant; the Captain's refusal to hear Rose mention her mother's name is probably a comic allusion to Willy Fisher's angry visit to Adrian Stephen during which he explained, according to Woolf, "that since my brother's mother was his own Aunt, the rules of the Navy forbade any actual physical punishment."¹¹ Rose's farcical adventure, like Woolf's, exposes the absurdity inherent in such solemnly cherished codes of honor.

The somnolent judges at the law courts, the vast and sentimental Academy pictures, Oxbridge's sterile researches into the question of

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Sappho's chastity,¹² all the inventions and institutions of men, fail to convince the women that men produce anything that proves their superiority. When they reach the subject of literature they again reflect the assumptions that Poll had challenged at the outset and that Bennett had put forth in *Our Women*. One member observes, "no woman has ever been an artist, has she Poll?" (*CSF*, p. 126). Poll's response echoes Woolf's first letter to Affable Hawk. "'Jane-Austen-Charlotte-Brontë-George-Eliot,' cried Poll, like a man crying muffins in a back street." This impressive list fails to persuade Eleanor, as it failed to persuade Affable Hawk, and she quotes "from a weekly newspaper" a statement which is almost that of Affable Hawk: "Since Sappho there has been no female of first rate. . . ." Unable to agree about the past, they now turn to contemporary writers. Although Elizabeth has also taken to disguise and spent the last five years writing reviews as a man, she cannot evaluate the popular novelists. "Do they write good books?" they ask of Wells, Bennett, Compton Mackenzie, Stephen McKenna, and Hugh Walpole (*CSF*, p. 127).

"Good books?" she said, looking at the ceiling. "You must remember," she began, speaking with extreme rapidity, "that fiction is the mirror of life. And you can't deny that education is of the highest importance, and that it would be extremely annoying, if you found yourself alone at Brighton late at night, not to know which was best boarding house to stay at. . . ."

"But what has that got to do with it?" we asked.

"Nothing—nothing—nothing whatever," she replied.

"Well, tell us the truth," we bade her.

And to this insistent demand Elizabeth must finally answer, "'Oh, the truth . . . has nothing to do with literature.'" Elizabeth's desperate defense of the usefulness of these novels as guidebooks to rooming houses in seaside resorts may be a comic allusion to Arnold Bennett's novel *Hilda Lessways*, a portion of which is set in a Brighton boarding house.¹³ Also, Elizabeth's assumption that "truth" has nothing to do with literature, an assumption undoubtedly based on all the novels written by men that she has read, will be contradicted in "Monday or Tuesday," the work that follows "A Society" in the collection, in which the narrator is engaged in a persistent, if oblique, search for "truth."

Elizabeth's failure to provide them with conclusive evidence about the modern writers is now forgotten as the cry "'War! War! War!'" is heard from the street. Cassandra's report is deeply ironic: "'What war?' we cried. 'What war?' We remembered, too late, that we had never thought of sending anyone to the House of Commons. We had

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forgotten all about it" (CSF, pp. 127–28). This comment reminds us that in 1914 women could neither vote nor stand for election to Parliament. In *Three Guineas*, written at the start of World War II, Woolf will provide answers to the question that goes unanswered here: "'Why,' we cried, 'do men go to war?'" (CSF, p. 128)¹⁴

A five-year break now intervenes before the second and final part of the story begins, in June 1919, on the day of the signing of the Treaty of Peace. In the scene that opens this section, Cassandra and Castalia casually look through the society's old minute books and comment on how much their ideas have changed. "'We are agreed,' Castalia quoted, reading over my shoulder, 'that it is the object of life to produce good people and good books.' We made no comment upon that," Cassandra notes (CSF, p. 128). In the typescript of "A Society," Cassandra's reply was originally less tentative: "'That was a bad shot wasn't it?'" Woolf typed and then canceled. After reading out the next sentence in the minutes—"A good man is at any rate honest, passionate and unworldly"—Cassandra says, "'What a woman's language!'" Woolf's difficulties with this comment are revealed in the typescript. She had typed "'Nobody but a woman could have written that' I observed." Above this she wrote and then canceled "'That is a very feminine opinion,' I observed."¹⁵ These variants suggest that she was trying to reflect the biases contained in the assertion without making use of derogatory female stereotypes. Cassandra's comment in the published version is ambiguous for it places the emphasis on the language as much as on the opinion it expresses. Castalia is more direct. "'What fools we were!'" she exclaims.

Castalia had in fact played a major role in changing one of their fundamental assumptions, for she had stunned the other members of the society by breaking their vow of chastity during her researches at Oxbridge and becoming pregnant. Her action provoked an amusing debate about chastity, which Poll decided was "'nothing but ignorance—a most discreditable state of mind. We should admit only the unchaste to our society,'" (CSF, p. 124). At her suggestion they made Castalia the president of the society.¹⁶ Now Castalia worries about her daughter Ann who, despite Castalia's efforts to prevent her, has learned to read:

"I caught Ann only yesterday with a newspaper in her hand and she was beginning to ask me if it was 'true.' Next she'll ask me whether Mr. Lloyd George is a good man, then whether Mr. Arnold Bennett is a good novelist, and finally whether I believe

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in God. How can I bring my daughter up to believe in nothing?" she asks. (CSF, p. 128)

Cassandra's suggestion (which could be taken straight out of *Our Women*) that Castalia "teach her to believe that a man's intellect is, and always will be, fundamentally superior to a woman's," seems intended to provoke Castalia's impassioned response: "Oh, Cassandra why do you torment me? Don't you know that our belief in man's intellect is the greatest fallacy of them all?" (CSF, p. 129). Unless some way can be found, Castalia concludes, undoubtedly thinking of the war, to make men the bearers of children and thus give them an "innocent occupation . . . we shall perish beneath the fruits of their unbridled activity. . . ." We may extend the implications of this wish by recalling Woolf's second letter to Affable Hawk, in which she points out that the occupation that has engaged women "from the earliest times" of bringing "forth the entire population of the universe" has not only taken much time and strength and "brought them into subjection to men," it has also, she says, "bred in them some of the most lovable and admirable qualities of the race" (DII, pp. 341-42). Perhaps the "innocent occupation" of childbearing would not only keep men too busy to engage in wars, but also, Castalia may imply, would improve their natures.

While Cassandra and Castalia talk, they hear men in the street "crying hoarsely and wearily" that the Treaty of Peace has been signed. This passage, which associates Castalia's concern for her daughter's future and her denunciation of the fruits of men's intellect with the war and its aftermath, both foreshadows *Three Guineas* and echoes a statement Woolf makes in her first letter to Affable Hawk. "Thus," she says after outlining the obvious progress of women's achievements through the centuries, "though women have every reason to hope that the intellect of the male sex is steadily diminishing, it would be unwise, until they have more evidence than the great war and the great peace supply, to announce it as a fact" (DII, p. 339). Cassandra now makes a second suggestion, which Castalia accepts. "'Once she knows how to read,'" she says of Ann, "'there's only one thing you can teach her to believe in—and that is herself.'" "Well," Castalia sardonically observes, "'that would be a change'" (CSF, p. 130). The story ends on an ironic note. They tell Ann, who is happily playing with her doll, that she has been chosen "President of the Society of the future—upon which she burst into tears," Cassandra adds, "poor little girl."¹⁷

Cassandra's ironic tone does not disguise the serious implications of this ending. The deliberations of the original society were brought to an

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abrupt and premature end by the war. In now handing the society's minutes and its presidency over to her daughter, Ann, Castalia is establishing a matrilineal line of descent. Perhaps Ann and the society she forms will find a way, as the original society did not (for this was not their intention), to change their world and the men who control it.

The suggestion—and it is only that—that a matriarchal society could evolve to replace the bellicose patriarchal one is supplemented in the story by the richly allusive names Woolf gives her characters. The very range of names, from those with mythic, biblical, and literary associations, to those with more recent historical antecedents, to familiar pet names, suggests a long female tradition of which these women are a vital part. Woolf's use of allusive names contributes to her portrayal of the cultural context in which these women live and often enhances the playful, comic, even at times farcical, aspects of the story. "Be truthful," Woolf urges her audience of women in *A Room of One's Own*. "Comedy is bound to be enriched" (*RO*, p. 137). While the characters are not developed in any detail—no descriptions of them are given—their names seem intended to function metaphorically and thus to add another level of meaning to the story.¹⁸

Only three characters are clearly distinguished from the others: Cassandra, Poll, and Castalia. Woolf had already given her narrator's name, Cassandra, to Katharine Hilbery's cousin in *Night and Day*. Katharine tells William Rodney, who will fall in love with Cassandra, that her cousin "is what they call a Feminist. . . . Or rather, she was a Feminist six months ago, but it's no good supposing that she is now what she was then" (*ND*, p. 371). Cassandra Otway gives no sign of being a feminist now, but the notion that she might have been one may have prompted Woolf to use her name again in this story. Had Cassandra Otway stayed in London, developed her capacity for "raillery and criticism" (*ND*, p. 362), and severed her tie with the tiresome William Rodney, she might have become the wry and ironic narrator of "A Society."

Cassandra Otway bears no resemblance to her Trojan namesake. In the short story, however, the name clearly seems an ironic allusion to the prophetess who was condemned by Apollo to tell the truth and not be believed. Near the end of the story one of the members of the society shrewdly observes that men "'despise us too much to mind what we say'" (*CSF*, p. 126).¹⁹ A further allusion Woolf may possibly have had in mind is to Florence Nightingale's autobiographical fragment, "Cassandra," which presents a bitter and impassioned portrait of the restricted life of a young woman in the middle of the previous century.

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"Cassandra" was not published in full until 1928, when it appeared as an appendix in *The Cause*, Ray Strachey's history of the woman's movement. Woolf could have heard of it before that, however, from Lytton Strachey, who based his portrait of Florence Nightingale in *Eminent Victorians* on Sir Edward Cook's life of her (1913) in which portions of "Cassandra" are quoted.²⁰

Poll's name, one of the pet names for Mary, perfectly suits a woman who is condemned to read all the books in the London Library, for it is associated both with a parrot and with the Cambridge students—the Poll or Passmen—who read for a degree without honors. Castalia's name is equally suggestive. Castalia was a spring in Parnassus, sacred to the Muses, and named for a nymph who threw herself into it while fleeing the amorous Apollo. Its water was said to inspire those who drank it with the gift of poetry. When, after announcing that she is pregnant, Castalia regrets that her mother gave her that name (*CSF*, p. 123), she may be implying that she has betrayed the purity of her namesake. Woolf may also be playfully alluding to the inspiration Castalia must have given the handsome scholar in Oxbridge where, she admits, she has been answering questions instead of asking them.

Eleven other members of the society are named and one can, given the nature of names, find allusions in all of them. Only the following four, however, seem to me to be especially suggestive within the context of Woolf's story. The first of these, Clorinda, who proposes that the women find out what the world is like before they have any children (*CSF*, p. 119), has the name of the warlike pagan heroine in Tasso's epic poem, *Jerusalem Delivered*. The second, Judith, who proposes to dispense with prostitutes and to fertilize virgins by Act of Parliament (*CSF*, p. 124), is the name of the biblical heroine who saved her besieged town by entering the enemy camp disguised as a traitor and then cutting off the head of the commander, Holofernes, while he slept. Judith was celebrated for having achieved this heroic feat while also preserving her chastity. Judith is, in addition, the name Woolf gives in *A Room of One's Own* to Shakespeare's imaginary, gifted, and ill-fated sister who commits suicide after becoming pregnant with an illegitimate child. The third, Ruth, whose sarcastic observation that Sappho is a lewd invention of Professor Hobkin, whom Castalia observed in Oxbridge (*CSF*, p. 126), is the name both of another biblical heroine and of the central character in Mrs. Gaskell's 1853 novel of that name whose trials include giving birth to an illegitimate son. And finally, the observation that men despise women too much to mind what they say is made by Jill, the name Bennett uses throughout *Our Women* (a detail Woolf would have known

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from Affable Hawk's column) in his exemplary domestic scenes featuring "Jack and Jill."

Significantly, none of the female characters in "A Society" has a surname. The surnames of two of the men questioned by the women, Lord Bunkum and Sir Harley Tightboots, recall the more ridiculous characters in Restoration comedies. Also, Sir Harley's Christian name brings to mind the famous (and for Woolf infamous) London street of doctors.

Woolf supplements her use of allusive proper names by having some fun with the titles of the Royal Academy paintings given in Helen's report, for each is a quotation from a familiar English poem.²¹ The implication of this plethora of allusions seems to be that the large Academy paintings are little more than photographic representations of sentimental and often patriotic scenes.²² Helen has been so affected by these that she cries out "'Daughters of England!'" (another allusion)²³ before the others can subdue her.

A month before *Monday or Tuesday* was published, Woolf speculated in her diary about its critical reception. "And as for A Society," she imagined reviewers saying, "though spirited, it is too one-sided" (DII, p. 98). Her prophecy was correct. Desmond MacCarthy, writing as Affable Hawk in the *New Statesman* on April 9, 1921, liked *Monday or Tuesday* on the whole, but noted that "when, as in 'A Society,' she writes from contempt, her work is not her best." Clive Bell later said (in *Dial*, December 1924) that "A Society" was "quite beneath her genius." However, a third critic, Harold Child, who was not a friend of Woolf's as the other two were, did see the playful side of her story. "And while the whole book is either humourous or witty," he wrote of *Monday or Tuesday* in his *TLS* review, "there is a thread of hearty, 'masculine' fun woven in with the shrewd and wicked wit of that very feminine (almost feminist) tale, 'A Society,' which brings one to outright laughter."²⁴ Child's cheerful use of sexual stereotypes is all too reminiscent of Woolf's earlier exchange with Affable Hawk. Not surprisingly, she found his review "complimentary enough, but quite unintelligent. I mean by that," she added, "they don't see that I'm after something interesting" (DII, p. 106).

These hostile or condescending and imperceptive reviews invite us to consider one last name that has multiple associations, and that is "society" itself. For the title refers, as we have seen, both to the "society for asking questions" which the women form and to the larger society which has shaped their lives. Woolf's reflections in *Three Guineas* on this second society are useful here. "The very word 'society,'" she observes,

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"sets tolling in memory the dismal bells of a harsh music: shall not, shall not, shall not. You shall not learn; you shall not earn; you shall not own. . . . Inevitably we look upon society, so kind to you, so harsh to us, as an ill-fitting form that distorts the truth; deforms the mind; fetters the will" (*TG*, pp. 190–91). This is the same society the "daughters of educated men" in "A Society" come, after their researches and the war, to see more clearly. And in the first sense, the society of women in Woolf's story can be seen as the ancestor of the Outsiders' Society that she proposes in *Three Guineas*, a society that will work "for our common ends—justice and equality and liberty for all men and women—outside your society," she tells her male correspondent, "not within" (*TG*, pp. 192–93). This may be, to return to Susanne K. Langer, the nucleus of the new society that could evolve out of the questions asked by these "outsiders." The new society will re-form, rather than cast off the old, just as Woolf in her allusive and playful story looks at the same world that men see, but sees it, as she says in *Three Guineas*, "through different eyes" (*TG*, p. 34).

The compelling links between the societies of women envisioned in "A Society" and *Three Guineas* bring to mind the observation Woolf makes in *A Room of One's Own*, that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (*RO*, p. 114). Ann's tears at the end of the story suggest that this inheritance may not always be welcome or easy; but it contains, as all of Woolf's feminist writings prophesy, unlimited potential for good.

The following abbreviations are used within the text:

CSF *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (London: Hogarth, 1985; San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt, 1985).

DI-V *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Vols. I–V, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Hogarth, 1977–84).

LI–VI *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Vols. I–VI, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: Hogarth, 1975–80).

ND *Night and Day* (London: Hogarth, 1971).

RO *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth, 1974).

TG *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth, 1968).

I am grateful to Quentin Bell and to the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations for permission to quote from the typescript of "A Society."

¹ "Foreword" to *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* (London: Hogarth, 1973), p. 7.

² The works in *Monday or Tuesday* are "A Haunted House," "A Society,"

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"Monday or Tuesday," "An Unwritten Novel," "The String Quartet," "Blue & Green," "Kew Gardens," and "The Mark on the Wall."

³ Some of Woolf's earlier critics shared what appears to have been her judgment of the story, but a number of more recent critics have recognized its importance both within Woolf's canon and within the larger context of feminist writing. Jean Guiget refers to "A Society" as a "failed venture into militant literature, which Virginia Woolf had the good taste to cast aside. . . ." He adds, however, that it contains "the germs of *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*" (Virginia Woolf and Her Works, trans. Jean Stewart [New York: Harcourt, 1976], pp. 341-42). Among the more enthusiastic critics of the story are Phyllis Rose, who finds "A Society" the most interesting story in *Monday or Tuesday* (Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978], p. 104); Selma Meyerowitz, who relates the "perspective for social change" offered in "A Society" to that in some of Woolf's other short stories ("What Is to Console Us?: The Politics of Deception in Woolf's Short Stories," in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jane Marcus [Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1981], pp. 238-52); and Jane Marcus, who offers an illuminating reading of it as "a mockery of the institutions of the men of [Woolf's] class" ("Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny," in *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, ed. Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1983], pp. 60-97).

⁴ Brenda Silver, *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), p. 23.

⁵ The *Daily Mail* and the *Manchester Guardian* both reviewed *Our Women* on 23 September. See *Arnold Bennett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. James Hepburn (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 87, for a summary of contemporary reviews.

⁶ *New Statesman*, 2 Oct. 1920, p. 704.

⁷ She opens her letter with a comment that leads me to assume that she did not read *Our Women*. "Like most women," she begins, "I am unable to face the depression and the loss of self respect which Mr. Arnold Bennett's blame and Mr. Orlo Williams' praise . . . would certainly cause me if I read their books in the bulk. I taste them, therefore, in sips at the hands of reviewers" (DII, p. 339). She would have found much to irritate her in Bennett's book, but she would have agreed with his argument that women need economic freedom. Although a central issue in *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, money seems not to concern the women in "A Society."

⁸ *New Statesman*, 9 Oct. 1920, p. 15.

⁹ In "The Political Thought of Virginia Woolf," Berenice A. Carroll argues that Woolf "often engaged in deliberate concealment of her political views," especially in her early works (*Feminist Studies*, 4, No. 1 [Feb. 1978], 101-02).

¹⁰ Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 17. (Her emphasis.)

¹¹ The surviving fragment of Woolf's account is reproduced in Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (London: Hogarth, 1972), I, 214-16. Her brother, Adrian, also wrote an entertaining account of the famous hoax. Adrian Stephen, *The "Dreadnought" Hoax* (London: Chatto, 1936; 1983).

¹² In "Liberty, Sorority, Misogyny," Jane Marcus explores the ways that references to Sappho in "A Society" reflect the "modern cult of Sappho" and

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the "search for the real Sappho which reached its peak in Paris before the First World War" (p. 81).

¹³ *Hilda Lessways* (1911) is the novel Woolf singles out for dispraise in her 1924 essay, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." For a useful discussion of the background of Woolf's essay, see Beth Rigel Daugherty, "The Whole Contention between Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Woolf, Revisited," in *Virginia Woolf: Centennial Essays*, eds. Elaine K. Ginsberg and Laura Moss Gottlieb (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston, 1983), pp. 269-94.

¹⁴ In "Virginia Woolf: The Life of Natural Happiness," Naomi Black draws our attention to a letter Woolf wrote in 1916 to Margaret Llewelyn Davies: "I become steadily more feminist, owing to the Times, which I read at breakfast and wonder how this preposterous masculine fiction [the war] keeps going a day longer—without some vigorous young woman pulling us together and marching through it" (LII, pp. 76). See *Feminist Theorists*, ed. Dale Spender (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 300.

¹⁵ The typescript of "A Society," p. 18.

¹⁶ We see more clearly how bold the society's views on chastity are if we recall Woolf's observation, made nearly a decade later, that chastity "has even now, a religious importance in a woman's life, and has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest" (RO, p. 75).

¹⁷ Ann's tears anticipate the ending of Woolf's later story "The Introduction," in which young Lily Everit comes to the realization that "this civilisation, churches, parliaments and flats" depends upon her. An old friend, seeing Lily after she has realized this, observes that she "looked 'as if she had the weight of the world upon her shoulders'" (CSF, p. 182).

¹⁸ For an excellent discussion of Woolf's use of names see Isobel Grundy, "Words without Meaning—Wonderful Words': Virginia Woolf's Choice of Names," in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays*, ed. Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (London: Vision Press, 1983), pp. 200-20.

¹⁹ This observation anticipates Woolf's early working title for *Three Guineas*, "On Being Despised" (DIV, pp. 271, 298).

²⁰ Stachey acknowledges Sir Edward Cook's biography at the end of his Preface to *Eminent Victorians* (New York: Putnam's, 1918), p. vii.

²¹ CSF, p. 121, and pp. 293-94, notes 2-9.

²² In "The Royal Academy" (*Athenaeum*, 22 Aug. 1919), Woolf observed that "Every picture . . . seemed to radiate the strange power to make the beholder more heroic and more romantic; memories of childhood, visions of possibilities, illusions of all kinds poured down upon us from the walls" (*Collected Essays* [London: Chatto, 1967], IV, 210).

²³ In *The Daughters of England*, Sarah Ellis advises her female reader that "As a woman, then, the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men—inferior in mental power, in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength" (New York: Appleton, 1842), p. 8. Unlike Bennett, who basks in the same assumption, Mrs. Ellis also offers advice on ways to compensate for that "deficiency," such as "exercising influence" (p. 14). This collusive element in the treatise is an example of what Elaine Showalter has referred to as "a kind of covert solidarity that sometimes amounted to a genteel conspiracy" among nineteenth-century women writers, and it thus gives Helen's

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cry an ironic edge (*A Literature of Their Own* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977], pp. 15–16).

²⁴ These reviews are reprinted in *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Robin Majumbar and Allen McLaurin (London: Routledge, 1975), pp. 87–91. Clive Bell's comment is on p. 142.

The Dialectical Epic: Brecht and Lessing

ROBERT ARLETT

If *The Golden Notebook* is "possibly the most ambitious British novel since *Ulysses*"¹ it is perhaps because, as Irving Howe pointed out in his early review of the novel, Lessing "grasps the connection between Anna Wulf's neurosis and the public disorders of the day. . . ."² Lessing's introduction to the paperback edition of *The Golden Notebook* asserts that a principal motif of the novel, Anna's writing block, is caused by "the disparity between the overwhelming problem of war, famine, poverty, and the individual trying to mirror them."³ The problem lies, then, in the collision of the personal, interior life of the artist/individual with the events outside her.

The conflict between the individual and his relation to society is, for Lessing, a new encounter for the human consciousness, a legacy of the French Revolution, and we may see it as Lessing's primary theme in *The Golden Notebook* and also in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, *Summer before the Dark*, and the five-volume *Children of Violence* series. It is a preoccupation that, I think, makes Lessing a representative writer for her age. In *The Golden Notebook* and in works like *Daniel Martin*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and *Why Are We in Vietnam?* the welding of public and personal reaches an intensity where both situational irony and structural dialectic signal individual and global interdependence. The attempt to render the nature of a shared system of belief that is yet in conflict with the demands of the individual conscience brings us close to the condition of the epic novel in the mid-twentieth century. It is a time, for Lessing, when "the most epic movement of change ever known in history is taking place."⁴ Yet the work that attempts to glimpse that movement must render the individual consciousness as the artist must examine

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him/herself as representative being—an inheritance from, as Brian Wilkie shows, the Romantic epic poets who emerged after the French Revolution.

In an interview with Florence Howe, Lessing suggests that what interested her in *The Golden Notebook*, what still interests her, are “the ideas.” Thus she sees the work as much more detached than did the early critics who either attacked or praised what they saw as its intense contemporary female vision. When Lessing says that “you have to be a little apart . . . from an idea before you can see it,”⁵ she comes near to a technique that Brecht used to foster “that great epic theatre which corresponds to the sociological situation” and that would radically transform the theater so that it would “correspond to the whole radical transformation of the mentality of our time.”⁶ I think it worth examining the possibility that Brechtian stage theory, developed as “a non-Aristotelian dramaturgy,”⁷ provides a way for Lessing both to participate in her narrative and to reflect the interplay of inner and outer impulses. The development of the idea of the “real” in *The Golden Notebook* provides an example of the complex narrative scheme that Lessing erects to approximate the Brechtian epic.

In *The Four-Gated City*, which Lessing wrote following *The Golden Notebook*, the American literary agent Dorothy Sayers is reported as saying “that only second rate writers dealt with social conditions, or politics, or concerned themselves in any way at all with public affairs. . . .”⁸ Anna Wulf, the author of the notebooks that presumably are refined into “Free Women,” finds it impossible to be that “real great artist” who for Miss Sayers “creates truth and beauty from within himself. . . .” That, to Anna, would be “a lying nostalgia” (p. 63). Instead, she tries to devote a whole notebook, the Red, to her relationship with the political world. Yet, just as her personal life infiltrates the political reportage of that notebook, so political affairs become enmeshed into other, ostensibly more personal, notebooks.

In the Black notebook, the rendition of human personality competes with what Anna Wulf refers to, in connection with leftist doctrine, as the question of morality in art. After writing the first section of the Black notebook, she disdains her rendition of the group that goes to the Gainsborough Hotel in Mashopi by recognizing the nostalgia that governed her representation of events in Africa. At Mashopi, sexual matters seem to override the political. Yet the omnipresence of the political—the group at Gainsborough who share the vertiginous weekend at Mashopi are an active, if frustrated, Marxist subcell—suggests the point at which *The Golden Notebook* differs from a

work like *The Alexandria Quartet*. For while technique is similar—both novels, for example, juxtapose, interweave, third-person and first-person narratives—with Lessing sex and politics are interactive, while in Durrell's work political affairs tend to serve essentially as a romantic backdrop of intrigue rather than carrying the weight of authentic political encounter.

Anna sees her sessions with her Jungian psychiatrist, Mrs. Marks, or "Mother Sugar" as Anna and Molly call her, as a process of individuation, the freeing up of individual psychic pain by one's recognition that existence consists of aspects of an archetypal "epic story," so that one may separate oneself from the experience, fit it "like a mosaic into a very old pattern" (p. 471). But Anna, the new woman as she sees herself through her fictional mirror in the Yellow notebook, Ella, disagrees with Mrs. Marks's reach for therapeutic universalization because she is "convinced that there are whole areas of me made by the kind of experience women haven't had before" (p. 471). Anna, the thinking artist who wishes to separate that in herself which is archetypal from that which is new, cites the contemporary nightmare of nuclear annihilation in contending that her predecessors "didn't look at themselves . . . feel as I do . . ." (p. 472). The failure of the Jungian viewpoint in the face of "what is new" is reflected in what Anna sees as the insufficiency of the conventional novel as a means for the new consciousness to include "all of myself in one book," and it is why a new type of novel—a kind of novel that will approximate the gestalt that is *The Golden Notebook*—is necessary for Anna and for Lessing. Thus the insecure and uncertain condition of the present age ("one of the great turning points in history")⁹ is reflected by the continued tension between the third-person narrative of "Free Women" and the primarily first-person narrative complex of the notebooks.

As part of her Party work Anna gives lectures to small groups in which she compares the "group consciousness" of the communal art of the Middle Ages with the "driving egotism" of art in the "bourgeois era" where art is but a "shriek of torment" (p. 349). Thus, she lectures, art must return to social responsibility and to brotherhood. But the stammer which she develops during her lectures reflects her own fragmentation between the reach toward a personal art and that toward "commitment." This is an example of tensions within the work that represent Anna's fragmented response to the complexity of existence. But that complexity is reflected not merely in Anna's paradoxical life, but in the uncertain formations and information of the text itself. Thus in the third section of the Black notebook, we are told that an American

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friend of Anna, James Schafter, has submitted a short story to a magazine in lieu of a review of half a dozen novels. After the parenthetical note comes what one assumes is Schafter's short story, "Blood on the Banana Leaves." But this piece is obviously a parody, again, of "Frontiers of War" and thus seems to be a product of Anna's mind rather than of a character such as Schafter. In fact, the American's name shifts from Schafter to Schaffer, so we must accept that his short story is a product of Anna's (and/or Lessing's) continuing fictionalizing. The undercutting of assumed or expected versions of reality parallels Brechtian distancing technique, a way of being "apart, a little bit, from an idea before you can see it,"¹⁰ and it is also a reflection of the complexities of modern experience and of the difficulties in reaching a moral stance in the face of those complexities.

In "Free Women" Tommy is the tragic result of the marriage between Richard Portmain and Molly, and becomes a blinded, zombie-like character; but in the Blue notebook he is a disappointingly conventional young Socialist, married to a "sensible little wife," and, in short, is what Molly sees as a representative of the "improbable farce" that is the temper of the time (p. 599). There are, then, apparently deliberate contradictions in the work that force the reader to maintain some detachment from the fable.

Willi Rodde, Anna's lover in the Mashopi sequences of the Black notebook (Anna will admit in the Blue notebook that Willi is really Max Wulf, her "real" first husband and the seeker of autobiographical elements in the novel will see Willi-Max, and Anton Hesse of *The Children of Violence* series, as Gottfried Lessing, the real novelist Doris Lessing's first husband who, like Willi-Max, was to become an East German commissar), whistles from *The Threepenny Opera* and casually wonders what happened to "a man named Brecht . . . he was very good once" (p. 113). I do not think it difficult to make a case for Lessing's familiarity with Brechtian strategies. Indeed, "Free Women" takes place in 1957, a year after the Berliner Ensemble presented the works of Brecht, recently dead, to a London audience. Brecht's theories of dramaturgy quickly influenced such British playwrights as John Osborne, John Arden, and Lessing herself. If such British playwrights adopted Brechtian techniques, Lessing the novelist found a way to render a far less stable reality than the romanticism of a work such as *The Grass Is Singing* (perhaps the "real" version of Anna's "Frontiers of War," or the initial Black notebook).

If Plato preferred epic poetry because it was less able to distort the real than did tragic drama, Brecht believed responsible social drama

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must avoid the Aristotelian/Stanslavskian premise that the audience should be made to believe that what they are witnessing is happening here and now. Whereas the popular illusionistic theater invited the audience's absorption into a character and a plot that headed toward emotional climax, Brecht's epic theater demanded a performance "presented quite coldly, classically and objectively."¹¹ The primary method of achieving such detachment was the "Verfremdungseffekt"—the distancing of the audience from the events on stage. To accomplish this distancing, illusionistic theater techniques were undercut—flaps, backdrops, wires, lights were openly revealed rather than disguised. Banners were hoisted across the stage revealing what was to come so that the audience would be freed "from the distraction of suspense."¹² Songs often contributed to the destabilizing of the play's rhythm, with the tone of the music at cross-purposes with the meaning of the words. Whereas the Stanislavskian technique attempted to immerse the actor into the personality of his character, Brecht applauded such performers as Charles Laughton, Peter Lorre, and Helene Weigel for their ability to withhold themselves from the characters they portrayed and thus avoid playing to the audience's hearts. Thus Brecht aimed to foster a theater of ideas rather than a theater of dreams.

So in *The Golden Notebook* the tensions between laconic chapter headings and actual narrative situation, the opposition between inside and outside narrative stance with "Free Women" and the notebooks, and the complex prismatic structure formed by the staggered sequence and interpenetrations of the novel's six primary components (the five sections of "Free Women," the four sections each of the Black, Red, Yellow, and Blue notebooks, plus the penultimate sequence that is the inner Golden Notebook) achieve a distancing that closely follows Brecht's struggle to have the theater appeal "less to the feelings than to reason."¹³ The distancing also keeps Lessing's own self at a kind of arm's length from her story until the final inner Golden notebook when the inner sensibility of the artist fully comes into play, when she is with her characters.

In the final section of the Blue notebook, Anna tries but fails to summon the image of the African patriot Tom Mathlong. She has failed to summon him, she decides, because of his quality of ironic detachment, "something we needed badly at this time," and that is something "certainly a long way from me" (p. 597). But, in fact, that ironic detachment has been Lessing's, if not Anna's, primary technique in the early stages of the novel. It has been a kind of Brechtian alienation that has held off the dissolving of flat characters into each

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other, and it is a technique that gives way, in the inner Golden notebook, to a breakdown of divisions, just as there is a dissolving into a character integration from early flat characters in Lessing's dramatic work *Play with a Tiger* (that movement is reversed in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* where an initially integrated sensibility moves away into detached and tragic fragmentation).

It is perhaps useful to keep in mind that Brecht was finally to modify his idea of "Epic Theatre" in favor of the more flexible, complex "dialectical" theater that could contain the possibility of "the unexpectedness of logically progressive or zigzag development, the instability of every circumstance, the joke of contradictions. . . ." ¹⁴ Indeed, Lessing's own system of dialectics in *The Golden Notebook* does not serve merely to keep us a little apart from an idea so that we may see it; it is also a way of rendering the complexities and insecurities of the modern age that prevent the contemporary novelist from enjoying that "faith in man himself" ¹⁵ that the nineteenth-century novelist could afford. That "state of embattled ideas," Lessing suggests in her interview with Florence Howe, is the condition of being on the Left today ¹⁶—a condition close to the prismatic complex of ironies that is the Brechtian epic or dialectic. Brecht's alienation methods for attaining an epic theater afford Lessing, I think, a way of examining the relationship between experience and fiction and they offer a way for her to move from the fragmented to the integrated personality, a way for Lessing herself to participate in the true experience of the inner Golden notebook, when her prism of characters—Anna, Ella, Molly, Saul, indeed all the faces from the four notebooks and "Free Women"—become the one voice of an inner universal experience.

Throughout the novel, Anna the artist and social being becomes concerned with finding, rendering the "real," with presenting character and circumstance as they are and not through the filter of nostalgic sensibility. Indeed, the journey toward the inner Golden notebook is a movement toward the real thing. The Black notebook presents a variety of sexuality, from the homosexuality of the Oxford group, to Maryrose's incest, to George Hounslow's miscegenetic adultery. Indeed, to Mark Spilka, sexual relationships and sexual capability form the backbone of Lessing's work. Thus Lessing's prototype "speaks freely and positively of 'real men' and 'real women'"; and, for Spilka, Lessing's "most obvious example of a 'real man' is George Hounslow in the African notebook." ¹⁷ Certainly Anna's initial presentation of Hounslow makes a strong case for his candidacy to "real manhood." He is "a real sensualist, not a man who played the role of one, as many do"

(p. 124). And he needs women, unlike the typical "affectionate, non-sexual men of our civilization" (p. 124). His quandary seems to be his very sexuality, which is out of place in a sexually lukewarm society: "When George looked at a woman he was imagining her as she would be when he had fucked her into insensibility. And he was afraid it would show in his eyes" (p. 124). As a result Hounslow is a mixture of "charming impatient humility" and "hidden arrogant power" (p. 124). Hounslow's relationship with the black servant Jackson's wife is a kind of reversal of the plot of *The Grass Is Singing* and apparently impetus for both "Frontiers of War" and the first section of the Black notebook itself. It points to the promise of a new political and human order that will replace present rigidity.

As she writes the notebook, Anna realizes that at the time of the book's action she was living in a "subjective highly-colored mist" (p. 137) so that this new version of things is an attempt to achieve an objectivity unlike the romantic "Frontiers of War." Yet some time after the report of Mashopi is finished, Anna, in retrospect, must admit that even this new attempt at truth is "full of nostalgia, every word loaded with it, although at the time I wrote it I thought I was being 'objective'" (p. 153). Thus events and characters in the notebooks must be accepted as "real" warily, as successive passages achieve new versions of truth and new versions of self-parody. In later sections of the novel the term "real" is devalued. Rose Latimer, the narrow-minded CP publishing house secretary, sees "The British Worker" and Party officials alike as "marvelous real people" (p. 357).

Likewise, in "Free Women," Anna's conventional daughter, Janet, whom Anna hopes will grow up to recognize one of the "few real men left" (p. 404) when she meets one, reacts to Anna's short-lived decision that her homosexual tenants Ivor and Ronnie must leave by demanding to go to "a real school" (p. 409)—a boarding school like that in the story that Ivor has read to her with cynical exaggeration. Anna's psychiatrist, Mrs. Marks, says that Anna is a "real woman" (p. 237), yet both Anna and Mrs. Marks herself must laugh at this term. We see notions of the "real" undercut in other Lessing works, for example in *The Summer before the Dark*, where Kate Brown's life of being "really married to a real husband"¹⁸ is ploughed under by a psychic excursion that forms a deeper kind of existence.

Even the depiction of George Hounslow, to which Mark Spilka attaches his standard for the real, seems to be tinged with overly romantic passages. Anna is attracted to his sexuality—"I fled inwardly, but inevitably turned towards" (p. 128)—yet to read that Hounslow's

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"black eyelashes made tiny rainbows as they trembled on his brown cheek" (p. 133) is to wonder whether this is an exact recollection or whether it is Anna's current sensibility (or perhaps current irony) in operation. The initial presentation of Hounslow is undercut by the excessively sentimental postures that he displays as events progress. George's reactions to Willi's undermining of his dilemma as father of a half-caste—"Now he stared off into the sunlight, blinking away tears and then he said: 'I'm going to get my glass filled' " (p. 131)—his "No, my bye-blow is not present" (p. 133), or his remark, as he sees Jackson—"the father of my child" (p. 142)—come close to sentimentality. His fantasy of a future reconciliation with his probable son comes across as forced, as much away from the real as Anna's early parodic synopsis of "Frontiers of War." His last scenes—such as "and George kept leaving us to pay visits to his caravan" (p. 146), or, when, as he is finally confronted by Jackson, he stammers "like an idiot talking" (p. 148) and stumbles from the kitchen—are a falling away from the character we first meet.

Though Anna, at one point, may claim that "Frontiers of War," written in "intoxification" after she had seen the caravan containing George and Marie, and the current notebook "have nothing at all in common" (p. 182), the language that fills the Black notebook and the later recognition that nostalgia governs her writing, suggest that the intoxication persists. Our last vision of the sexual prototype George Hounslow is of someone who has destroyed the security of his mistress' family for the sake of his appetite, and who seems "old and sad and unfinished . . . joking to save his life" (p. 151), a description that perhaps does not serve to show how the world punishes sensualists, but does operate to diminish Anna's initial elevation of him. Hounslow finally is relegated from being "real" to being a component of admitted fiction, and the authenticity of the Black notebook is increasingly devalued.

Though it would be myopic to deny that the sincerity of felt, authentic experience permeates the early Black notebook, one must also accept Lessing's testament that one "could put names to" the notebooks' characters "like those in the old Morality Plays" (p. viii). Thus George Hounslow might be as much a filtered aspect of personality as is Richard Portmain, the masculine stooge of "Free Women." If we are to find a right "real man," we might find him in the increasingly complex characters of Paul Tanner from the omniscient "The Shadow of the Third" in the Yellow notebook, Michael from the Blue and Red notebooks, and Saul Green in the Blue and inner Golden notebooks. If

the inner Golden notebook is the novel's place of decompartmentalization, then one would assume that Saul, the sum of all other men, is more a "real" man than George Hounslow in the novel's hierarchies, that Saul contains George's masculinity, his nostalgic sexual immaturity, just as he contains the sexist power of Richard Portmain in "Free Women" and the ambivalences of Paul Tanner, whose "real" equivalent is Michael.

Given the multiplicity of Saul Green's personality it is understandable that Anna has trouble deciding who is Saul and who is not Saul. After they first make love she notes that she had forgotten the experiences of making love to "a real man" (p. 561). But Saul is less free and positive an example of "real manhood" than George Hounslow, the real man of the initial section of the Black notebook. As Anna reads Saul's callous journal entries she has trouble reconciling the man she knew with the diarist who is "totally self-pitying, cold, calculating, emotionless" (p. 571). With difficulty, Anna decides that it is the Saul "who thought, judged, communicated, heard, what I said, accepted responsibility" (p. 591)—in short, perhaps the Saul who, he claims, is a product of Anna's Hollywood fantasy of domesticity—"who is the real man" (p. 591) and that the abusive Saul is "not 'him' talking" (p. 592). She senses that he will fight his way through the present insanity to become "a very gentle, wise, kind Man" who will help people to know they're "crazy in a good cause" (p. 626). It is the state of maturity ("Real people, the phrase is radiating serenity") reached, Anna claims, only after "a history of emotional crime." "Real people" leave behind "sad bleeding corpses that litter the road to maturity" (p. 626).

If the strategy of the earlier notebooks has been compartmentalization, of being "apart, a little bit," then the form of the inner Golden notebook is of breaking down into synthesis. *The Play with a Tiger* that Anna projects as she comes out of her initial dream sequence is, in fact, a "real" earlier play by Lessing where an English woman and an American male emerge from a variety of other quite stock male and female characters to melt down into a single persona in the final act. Just so, in the inner Golden notebook, Saul and Anna become "so close we could have become each other . . ." (p. 621). We can assume that the faces, the relatively cardboard characters of "Free Women" and the notebooks, merge into the two principal personalities, Anna and Saul Green, who indeed "break down . . . into each other, into other people . . ." (p. vii). The distancing that is the principal strategy in passages outside of the inner notebook is abandoned in the inner section that is "written by both of them, you can no longer distinguish between what is

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Saul and what is Anna, and between them and the other people in the book" (p. vii). At one level of the narrative Saul Green is "real" only in the sense that he is a satisfactory product of the efforts of a writer who wishes to render reality. Though Anna renders Saul Green in her own first-person, her achievement of Saul-Anna, her coupling with the new-world figure, represents, in its reach toward wholeness, a kind of omniscience for her, while for Lessing, the propagation of Anna-Saul represents an achieved fusion of her own sensibility with her tale of the tribe.

At least half of the "real" inner Golden notebook is not made available in the existent text. That is the full text of Saul's short, and apparently quite successful, novel about the Algerian revolutionary and his encounter with the French soldier who is his jailer. It is another rite of fusion as the Algerian, whose feelings are never those that are expected of him, and the Frenchman, whose thoughts, emotions, conform to pigeonholes, blend into a single committed personality. But the outside editor of the notebooks chooses only to present a summary of this section of the Golden notebook. Somehow a personality outside that of Saul and Anna is at work even in the inner notebook, so that if the narrative voice of this notebook includes Saul and Anna, it also includes another presence. If the inner Golden notebook represents that point where Anna Wulf, the artist, is able to include "all of myself in one book," it is also the point where Doris Lessing is able fully to participate in the consciousness of her character, to realize through the novel the totality of the mid-century experience. Thus, I think that Irving Howe misreads the shape of *The Golden Notebook* when he suggests that Lessing "fails to keep a sufficient distance from her heroine, so that Anna's hysteria comes dangerously close to taking over the narrative."¹⁹ To say that the "enormous intensity" achieved "through surrendering herself to Anna's suffering" results in "a loss of critical objectivity she had maintained in earlier pages"²⁰ is a failure to recognize that the very gesture of *The Golden Notebook* is to merge the author's own "small, personal voice" with that of her character. Sincerity now demands a narrative voice that participates in the confused path of the representative mid-century man/woman.

Authorial participation with the principal character/voice is less clearly signaled in Lessing's work than in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*; it takes place by a process of intercutting and undercutting that Brecht for so long used as distancing techniques in a theater he defined as epic and that he came to call "dialectical theatre." It informed the great Marxist/humanist's dramatic structures, and it informed the techniques

of acting that he came to applaud in such artists as Helene Weigel, Charles Laughton, and Peter Lorre whereby the performing artist is both within and without his/her representation. It constitutes an "unsteady ground," as Richard Gilman would call it,²¹ that provoked a distrust of Brecht's commitment to the Communist Party's apparatus and that would undoubtedly prove unsatisfactory for Tillyard's rigid requirements of the epic. Following Lessing's statement that the point of the book is less to present a continuous stream of revealed truths than it is "the relation of its parts to each other,"²² one might consider that the initial four notebooks represent the artist's reach toward (as well as the countermovement of protection from) the raw truth in the Golden notebook.

In the last chapter of "Free Women," Anna is no longer "all of myself in one book," but is once more fragmented and dispersed into the face characters who make up "Free Women" and the four notebooks. There is a new kind of ironic detachment as the novel closes—Molly and Anna laugh, in turn, at Molly's new compromising marriage, at Anna's new work, at Tommy's adjustment to his father's capitalism. Tommy, says Anna, "is in tune with our times" (p. 665). The short novel has returned to the ironical nature of its title, has become "a comment about the conventional novel" (p. xiv) and its inadequacies in light of the mass of material that makes up Anna's experiences. Indeed, there is a fairy-tale-like detachment to the book's last chapter. In the first paragraph Janet moves from "a little girl" to an independent "thirteen year old" (p. 647)—and Tommy's sudden transformation to where he is "already installed, and taking things over" (p. 664) at his father's tyconnery, seems totally to neglect the tragic figure of previous chapters of "Free Women." He seems to have leaped over from the pages of the notebooks where he had remained the conventional son without traumatic experience.

This final chapter pales beside the sincerity of the inner Golden notebook, is inadequate to save from diffusion the unifying process that has led up to the penultimate section. The narrative voice is more closely aligned to that of the outside editor who comments upon, arranges, cuts from, the five notebooks, than to the Anna who struggles to "get all of myself into one book." If there is a superior rendition of the real than that of the inner Golden notebook, then it is achieved in the totality, the multiple perspectives of *The Golden Notebook* as a whole as we move inside, outside the perspective of Anna Wulf. Considering the continued activity of the outside auditor/editor of the notebooks, I would suggest that the claims of Betsy Draine and Anne Mulkeen that

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Anna Wulf is the sole authorial voice in the "macrofiction" *The Golden Notebook*,²³ or of John Carey that, by assigning "Free Women" to Anna, Lessing "filters herself out of the novel entirely,"²⁴ neglect Anna's authorial stances, which are continually undercut by Lessing's turns of the novel that force our acceptance of the fact that her consciousness is the prime mover behind the revealing mask of Anna, just as Ella of the Yellow notebook is a thin, but welcome and necessary mask for a fictitious novelist who is struggling to begin again, still on the path to the achievement of the inner Golden notebook.

For Wayne Booth, an author's presence is always retained, an author "can never choose to disappear."²⁵ But for what we might call the contemporary epic novel, we may say that the author, in fact, chooses not to disappear. Her presence, sharing in modern predicaments, is, though perhaps painfully and with difficulty, acknowledged. In the autobiographical epic the artist understands that she has no right to speak for the age without attempting to depict the self within that age. Of late, even deconstructive instruments have been applied to that body of Lessing criticism that senses her narrative complexity. Thus Patrocínio Schweickart finds it convenient to apply Derridian images in describing how "the meaning" of *The Golden Notebook* "is articulated through the play of its hinged parts,"²⁶ and Elizabeth Maslen speaks of "the deconstruction of words"²⁷ in *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* and other novels. But Lessing is her own writer, not Derrida's, not Jane Somers', not Brecht's—though that snatch of a tune early in the Black notebook does achieve a kind of resonance as Lessing's dialectical epic progresses.

¹ Frederick Karl, *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel* (New York: Farrar, 1972), p. 313.

² Irving Howe, *Celebrations and Attacks: Thirty Years of Literary and Cultural Commentary* (New York: Horizon Press, 1978), p. 113.

³ Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), p. xii. All further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴ Doris Lessing, ed. Paul Schlueter, *A Small Personal Voice* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁶ Bertolt Brecht, ed. and trans. John Willett, *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1966), p. 23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

⁸ Doris Lessing, *The Four-Gated City* (New York: New American Library, 1973), p. 13.

⁹ Lessing, *A Small Personal Voice*, p. 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹¹ Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 15.

¹² Martin Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Works* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 134.

¹³ Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

¹⁵ Lessing, *A Small Personal Voice*, p. 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁷ Mark Spilka, "Lessing and Lawrence: The Battle of the Sexes," *Contemporary Literature*, 16 (1975), 218–40.

¹⁸ Doris Lessing, *The Summer before the Dark* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), p. 42.

¹⁹ Howe, *Celebrations and Attacks*, p. 117.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

²¹ Richard Gilman, *Common and Uncommon Masks* (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 116–32. Gilman applies this term to another member of the British school of Brecht, John Arden.

²² Lessing, *A Small Personal Voice*, p. 51.

²³ Betsy Draine, "Nostalgia and Irony: The Postmodern Order of *The Golden Notebook*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 1 (1980), 47; Anne Mulkeen, "Twentieth Century Realism: The 'Grid' Structure of *The Golden Notebook*," *Studies in the Novel*, 4 (1972), 266.

²⁴ John Carey, "Art and Reality in *The Golden Notebook*," *Contemporary Literature*, 14 (1973), 437–56.

²⁵ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 20.

²⁶ Patrocínio Schweickart, "Reading a Wordless Statement: The Structure of Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 2 (1985), 263–79.

²⁷ Elizabeth Maslen, "Doris Lessing: The Narrator and the Reader," a paper read to the Doris Lessing Society at the MLA Convention, December 1985.

The Unknown Angus Wilson: Uncollected Short Stories from the Fifties and After

J. H. STAPE

A number of stories published in the 1950s and excluded from Angus Wilson's three short-story collections throw considerable light on the discovery and development of his distinctive voice and on his exploration of the genre. These early stories published in London newspapers, in periodicals specializing in short fiction, and in thematic anthologies, though they share to a certain extent the tone and themes of those collected in *The Wrong Set* (1949) and *Such Darling Dodos* (1950), belong neither in those books nor in *A Bit off the Map* (1957), despite their common focus on displacement, self-deception, and irresponsible innocence.¹ While they differ from the first collections partly in scale, their exclusion from *A Bit off the Map* can be accounted for by that collection's self-conscious attempt at mid-Fifties topicality.

Two later stories—a self-sustained fragment from an abandoned novel, “My Husband Is Right,” published in 1961 in an issue of *The Texas Quarterly* devoted to contemporary British writing, and a Christmas story, “The Eyes of the Peacock,” commissioned by the *Sunday Times* and published in 1975—largely serve a preparatory function, rehearsing ideas given full-scale treatment in novels. “My Husband Is Right” anticipates some of the thematic interests of *No Laughing Matter* (1967), and “The Eyes of the Peacock” contains in embryo the characters and principal motifs of *Setting the World on Fire* (1980).² The early stories and the later ones demonstrate a continuity of interest and treatment, confirming Wilson's obsession with the

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wellsprings of his imagination in his childhood and adolescence and reiterating his fascination with certain human types.

Although the recovery of the stories published in the 1950s allows for a more complete view of Wilson's development as a writer, a reading of them does not encourage a revaluation of his contribution to the short story, nor do the stories depart radically either in method or concern from his other works of the 1950s: penetrating psychological insight abets a commitment to humane values and sharp social observation establishes and provides a context for character. And as do a number of the stories collected in *The Wrong Set* and *Such Darling Dodos*, these fictionalize aspects of Wilson's own life and experiences. Rodney in "Aunt Cora" and Julia in "The Men with Bowler Hats" recall the emotional tensions and economic realities of Wilson's fraught and insecure childhood as do the tensions developed in "Aunt Mathilde's Drawings" and "Her Ship Came Home." "Who for Such Dainties?" mocks the intellectual cocktail-party set that lionized Wilson after the immediate success of *The Wrong Set* and *Such Darling Dodos*.³ And while superficially more distanced from his own experience, "Unwanted Heroine" and "An Elephant Never Forgets" evoke the psychology and behavior of highly self-conscious but painfully self-deceived women—a Wilson forte—characters all in some way recalling his mother, whose egotistic self-sacrifice he presents full-length in *No Laughing Matter* (1967). Loneliness, alienation, and brutality, themes that dominate Wilson's early work, are forcefully developed in "Animals or Human Beings" and "Mrs. Peckover's Sky . . .," stories that share a pattern whereby fascination becomes disillusion and, ultimately, rejection.

In short, the uncollected stories of the 1950s point to positions Wilson later elaborated in *The Wild Garden*, the most extended exegesis of his writings: that his life, transformed, forms the basis of his art, and, indeed, in some wise gives it shape and coherence, and since life and art are for the artist inseparable, that criticism of a writer's work must take into account a writer's biography, a position elaborated in his critical works on Zola, Dickens, and Kipling. At the same time, as, in the main, a realist, Wilson attempts to convince his reader of the validity of a presented world. The dual necessity of personal revelation, however disguised or distanced, conjoined with an engagement of the "actual" world (re-created and transformed by the imagination) creates a tension that informs and animates much of Wilson's early work, giving it its "period" vividness as well as its more enduring significance as an exploration of the human—and humanist—dilemma.

Wilson's concern with self combined with its apparent contradic-

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tion—a fascination with others—is most directly evidenced in “Aunt Cora,” “The Men with Bowler Hats,” and “Mrs. Peckover’s Sky . . .,” stories patently autobiographical in inspiration. More a character sketch than a story, “Aunt Cora” (1950) presents a vivid recollection of an eccentric old woman through the sympathetic eyes of her “highly strung” young nephew. An Edwardian figure in manner and dress, and immensely rich, Aunt Cora with “her rose-decked picture hats, her hour-glass figure and her lace parasols” is an exotic visitor to the boy’s “quiet Weybridge home.” The figure of family legend—an invented operatic career explains her “retinue of young tenors and teachers of the tango”—in the mid-1920s she drops young men to take up spiritualism, the new but enduring interest about which the sketch’s two incidents revolve. An afternoon luncheon party “on a rather hot June afternoon in 1933” concludes with a search for her valuable ruby ring spirited away by “malign influences,” which, to the embarrassment of Rodney’s parents, are found to be incarnated by Lady Grackle, a fellow guest in whose handbag the ring is found.

The second major incident—Rodney’s visit to her flat at age fifteen, a visit that consists largely of “an exhausting afternoon of table turning, clairvoyance and every other psychic performance in which her histrionic powers could shine”—plays up her delicate sense of manners. He fails to realize that her knock upon a door as they leave the parlor for tea in the library, far from being yet another psychic exhibition, primly indicates the room where he should “wash his hands.” And her legacy to him recalls his indiscretion: abroad in the forces when she dies, he inherits an Edwardian etiquette book with the chapter “How to Enter and Leave the Room” carefully marked.

Cora’s is a kind of fantasy world carefully created and maintained as a means of escaping harsh and insistent reality, and while her “period” quality makes her an exotic—almost, perhaps, a grotesque—it engenders the boy’s affectionate attitude to her. Rodney, however, already showing signs of a greater commitment to the actual world, feels considerably less positive about her psychic explorations, activities that, nonetheless, ally her to the theatrical and dramatic and represent an intrusion of the imagination (albeit not of the highest kind) into his everyday existence. Cora as a neurotic type symbolizes the dangers of imaginative engagement with its invitation to escapism, and Rodney’s affectionate but ultimately distanced reaction to her signifies his ability to discern the imagination as a potentially devouring force. The story, then, dramatizes the artist’s dual and simultaneous attraction to the

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inner and outer worlds, cautioning that total engagement in either negates the possibility of creating art.

As social comment, "Aunt Cora" explores the collision between the manners and morals of distinct historical moments. Cora the Edwardian survives to see her values and habits superseded by another, less delicate age, maintaining them in the face of change and even attempting their perpetuation by the symbolic legacy she leaves her nephew. In a way, the story metaphorically summarizes the situation of postwar England not yet fully convinced of the profound alteration of its social landscape, attempting to ward off the consequences of change by repeating fixed habits that had lost their force and significance (much as Wilson's own parents, living beyond their needs and means, attempted to maintain a facade of "normality" in the face of declining social status and income).

Although "Aunt Cora" lacks the polish of the best of Wilson's early work, it provides a rare and valuable glimpse of his fictional apprenticeship, allowing the sympathetic reader to observe more directly than in Wilson's mature writings the transformation of autobiography into art. The story plays an obvious role as apprentice work exorcising familial ghosts that might have hindered the development of Wilson's craft and imagination. The title character, in later guises the Miss Rickard of *No Laughing Matter* and Great-aunt Cara of "The Eyes of the Peacock," apparently conflates aspects of his own "very histrionic" mother with a more distant relation by marriage who as her late husband's parrot sat upon her shoulder claimed it embodied his departed spirit.⁴ The story may also recollect the two friends who served as sources for the Misses Swindale of "Raspberry Jam," lonely women who befriended a lonely boy and in turn received his sympathetic understanding, though the boy in question was not Wilson himself but one of his brothers.⁵ However, the depiction of Rodney (the name is also used in "Necessity's Child," an acknowledged self-portrait) clearly resumes autobiographical elements, and the figure of the lonely and sensitive individual who escapes a banal environment by a fantasizing capacity recurs throughout Wilson's fiction.

The long story "An Elephant Never Forgets" (1951) focuses sharply on conflict, loneliness, egotism, and false pretenses. The friendship between Mildred Vereker, the "uncrowned queen" (p. 30) of a seaside resort town, and the newcomer Delice, the title's "elephant" who dabbles in clairvoyance but whose actual stock-in-trade lies in overblown emotionalism and a self-consciously created "exotic" atmosphere, is observed by Constance, an old friend of Mildred's just

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returned from a two-year absence abroad. Set in 1921 with a sequel in 1926, the story allows Wilson to evoke 1920s mores and fashions through the eyes of a waspish middle-aged woman, a voice he uses to great comic and ironic effect in *For Whom the Cloche Tolls* (1952).

The story is essentially a character study and a drama of types: the observant Constance is at times subtly undercut by her own society voice; Delice serves as a kind of dry run for the monstrous egotism and lack of self-awareness of Inge in *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*; Mildred takes on the role of queen bee in provincial society; and her son Reggie, the lady's man on the make, even succumbs briefly to Delice's faded charms (though he calls her "Jumbo" behind her ample back). Detailed description abets and sometimes substitutes for characterization:

Her rather stoutly-built but erect figure swam towards me through the sea of occasional tables, grand pianos, curio cases, Japanese screens, bowls of sweet peas and pots of hydrangeas that still marked her drawing room as a backwater of the Edwardian era. She was always well dressed but, after the more modish Parisian chic, her tight-skirted cornflower blue shantung coat and skirt with its rows of large buttons at the sides and the large tongued, buckled, white linen shoes, though highly suitable for the hot weather, carried a suggestion of a war-time fashion that was now well on the way out. (p. 31)

The story's central interest lies in detailing Delice's decline and fall; Mildred's eyes are gradually opened, Delice becomes increasingly possessive and extravagant (there is a slight suggestion of lesbianism), Reggie and Constance fail to take to Mildred's new acquisition, and finally Delice is expelled from Seastone society. Five years later she takes her revenge as she arrives—unexpectedly and uninvited—at a pre-matinee luncheon attended by Reggie's fiancée and her parents—Sir Eric and Lady Stetson—and, of course, Constance. Delice is a triumph of vulgarity, patronizing everyone, and pretending to great intimacy with the Verekers. In short, the moral in the story's title becomes a reality.

"An Elephant Never Forgets" succeeds as a nuanced rendering of a social world but fails to connect that world with larger issues so that the story remains only a clever character sketch of its arch and observant narrator and her circle, a study of sensibilities through the eyes of a limited narrator. The story's moral comment is muted: such types call down their own condemnation, but they are, after all, the "darling dodos" that Wilson depicts with such force in the collection of that name.

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The "darling dodo" theme also dominates two of Wilson's *Evening Standard* stories—"Aunt Mathilde's Drawings" (1952) and "Silent Pianist" (1952)—both of which focus on old women caught in harsh new realities. Aunt Mathilde, in her youth a famous French artist's model and mistress, lives now on her relatives' sufferance while her colorful past gives her a certain cachet as does the "portfolio of drawings done by the great painter" which "everyone agreed must be worth a very good deal." Living beyond their means, the Templetons, her long-suffering relations, seek a valuation only to learn that Aunt Mathilde's "engravings" prove to have been "a famous and good series in their day," but are not, in fact, worth very much. The story closes with an ironic twist as a neighbor robbed of her jewels becomes the object of Aunt Mathilde's contempt: "My dear," she said, "how stupid to have rreal jewels and furs in the home. She should have lettles copies made," a comment that causes Mrs. Templeton "almost to hate her aunt."

The uncovering of deception forms the story's core as Wilson dissects familial relationships based on an absence of feeling and a lack of scruples. Again, the family is posited as a cruel and heartless social structure, a reaction, in part, against its sentimental treatment in much popular fiction. The Templetons and Aunt Mathilde are equally unsympathetic, and this minor story gives shape to an almost Balzacian vision of the predatory character of human relationships.

"Silent Pianist," like many of Wilson's stories, targets moral failure and self-deception as the out-of-date Mrs. Ramsay (a stab at Virginia Woolf, whose work Wilson then saw unsympathetically) attempts to maintain a vanished world by means of too much make-up and an overly dramatic manner. Lonely and desperate for attention, she tries first to interest the waitress in the "stuffy, beer-fumed saloon bar dining-room" where she takes her lunch and next seeks to engage in conversation Stephen, a man at the next table. Her false manner bores and slightly irritates him while she makes unoriginal observations on the food and the weather before finally proclaiming the negative effect television has had on the cinema. She herself had played the piano at the cinema before "those ugly harsh talkies" came along, she informs him, and in unself-conscious contradiction has to hurry along to an afternoon film—"It doesn't do to be late for the cinema, does it? Always such long queues."

The story has two targets: the "dodo" world Mrs. Ramsay lives in and the callous modern one that the waitress and Stephen inhabit. An early version of Rose Lorimer in *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, Mrs. Ramsay simultaneously invites sympathy and criticism in her preference for

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fantasy to reality. But the waitress and Stephen alike are victims of self-absorption, finally symbolizing its passive cruelty. Although principally the portrait of an old woman as self-con-artist, the story's moral aim gives it more than simple period interest as Wilson's observant eye gleams with the satirist's intention.

The brief story "Who for Such Dainties?" (1952), also typical of Wilson's early work in its precise social observation and multilayered ironic treatment of manners, develops two characters—Harriet Mackenzie, a snob whose comeuppance provides the story's main action, and Maurice Neaves, "the greatest Shakespearean actor in England," himself a bit of a poseur. A third character, Pamela Vaughan, a "mountainous, pink blancmange-like woman, with her strident blue dress, purple hair and glittering bangles and brooches" (p. 233), author of a play about smuggling in eighteenth-century Truro, forms the pivot about which the minimal action and central irony turn.

The opening cocktail party, a device to establish mood and character, prepares for the principal incident—a disastrous lunch for Harriet at Pamela's flat. The final scene—a conversation between Harriet and Maurice about this luncheon—occurs "many weeks" later. The luncheon at Pamela's is characteristically detailed: the "good" sherry followed by a "good" borsch soup form the prelude to a Rumanian stew gone amiss: "Pamela's meat ration would not allow for more than lumps of fat in the stew, whilst the olives and plums had stuck to the saucepan and were burned" (p. 235). The dessert—stewed guavas served in treacle—irritates Harriet's teeth, which are "badly in need of stopping" (p. 235). The topic of conversation is, inevitably, Maurice Neaves, and Harriet, annoyed by the food and with her teeth on edge, in the end decides that "such a woman" should never be helped. In the final episode she maliciously serves up Maurice a description of that "terrible woman's" lunch, which in her version consists only of the borsch soup. And Maurice, surprised to hear of Harriet's ill-luck, for Pamela had treated him to "the most delicious of stews with all the produce of the East in it, and guavas, lovely guavas, cooked excellently in treacle" (p. 236), announces coolly that he is planning to produce Pamela's play, *Cornish Cream*, in the spring.

"Who for Such Dainties?" contains all the elements of a clever and well-told joke, but suffers from being overly concise. Wilson nonetheless manages, even in so confined a space, to depict convincingly the moral atmosphere of snide and overly self-concerned individuals. The deftly sketched characters, self-conscious surprise ending, and richly ironic title evidence the same thorough mastery of craft found in *The Wrong*

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Set and Such Darling Dodos. Although in either of these collections the story might appear slight, on its own it remains an amusing if barbed pleasantry. Typically, none of its characters escape criticism: Pamela, obviously on the make to advance her career, plays up both her guests; Harriet's thinly disguised social pretensions serve only to assuage a rather crude need for one-upmanship; and Maurice, the actor-manager, succumbs to Pamela's obvious flattery, a victim less of good food than of his own oversized ego. The self-deception Harriet and Maurice practice lays them open to Pamela's cynical machinations, and, although she perhaps deserves to succeed, the world in which she does is the unpleasant one delineated in Wilson's first two collections: that of a rationing Britain shaken by political and economic changes with their attendant social consequences.

Like "Who for Such Dainties?," "The Men with Bowler Hats" (1953) treats the dispossessed middle class and its compulsive need to maintain appearances, and, if possible, get ahead. The social setting, what Malcolm Bradbury has called "frayed at-the-heels upper-middle class gentility," is, however, less important for its own sake than for the opportunity it provides Wilson to explore the antagonism between adult life—existence circumscribed by class, economic circumstances, and acute self-awareness—and the imaginative world, represented frequently in his fiction by children or the childlike.⁶ The story's protagonist, Julia, a girl of eight, whose contact with adult reality is fraught and only partially understood, unwittingly engineers yet another change of circumstances for herself and her affectionate but irresponsible father, Mr. Chalers, another "Raffish Old Sport," a type patently based on Wilson's own father.⁷

After a brief introduction of characters, the story focuses on a single dramatic situation: the new relationship between Mr. Chalers and Mrs. Gregoby, an American widow with a nine-year-old son, Timmie. (Mrs. Gregoby, similarly a Wilson type, the "Widow Who Copes," has analogues in other stories—"Heart of Elm," "Sister Superior," "Christmas Day in the Workhouse"—as well as in *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot* and *Late Call*; the American widow in England also appears in *Hemlock and After* and *Setting the World on Fire*, another evidence of Wilson's obsession with certain types, this possibly based on autobiographical sources.)⁸ Mr. Chalers envisages how much this friendship will alter his economic condition, while Mrs. Gregoby, "Auntie Rosemary" to Julia, herself looks forward to an improved economic condition after marrying "Daddy." The classic misunderstanding, rendered with ironic as well as comic touches, moves forward to its

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logical and inevitable conclusion as the children's games reveal the truth. Timmie's dress-up imitation of "waiters and porters, and the ladies in curl-papers" turns out to be no less knowledgeable than Julia's, and when the adults discover their offspring "wearing black paper hats on their heads and pretending to drink tea out of mugs," the children's imaginative re-creation of an unpleasant reality occasions the now predictable end of the adult "friendship." On their way home Julia explains to Daddy that she and Timmie were playing "the men in bowler hats that come to people's houses" (bailiffs), adding that Timmie remembered them as having come four times to his. The whole adult, fictional structure of mutual deception and self-deception collapses with her revelation, and the story ends with Mr. Chalperts informing the hotel porter that he will always be out when Mrs. Gregoby calls, an, of course, unnecessary precaution.

A transparent reworking of Wilson's own early life, like Julia's economically strained and passed in a string of London residential hotels, "The Men with Bowler Hats" is especially interesting for the unresolved conflict between pleasure and responsibility, a theme fully treated in *Hemlock and After*.⁹ The story's underlying structure sees adult concerns—sex, money, class—overturned by the children's "innocence." As Julia and Timmie's make-believe world forces the adults to confront their true situation, Mr. Chalperts' repeated confrontations with the bowler hat—on the one hand, the symbol of social respectability and financial success, and, on the other, of his personal failure—always result in the unmaking of his dreamworld.

The children's appropriation of this symbol is not only an accusation of failure aimed at the parental figures for their unwillingness to make a contract with the adult world, but also represents their premature adulthood. The knowing child corrupted by experience and the childlike or childish adult unable to disentangle himself from the charms of childhood are figures Wilson typically uses to focus on the commitment and responsibility necessary to a fully adult, moral life. But such maturity, he realizes, is achieved all too frequently at the expense of the imagination. (This tension, particularly acute for some artists, might be seen as coming to a head in Wilson's breakdown during the war, the result, in part, of his having to confront a situation in which his previous adaptation to life—a talent for mimicry and capacity for fantasy—proved wholly inadequate to the demands wartime realities placed on him.) As Julia and Timmie in "The Men with Bowler Hats" don adult clothing and ape adult manners, the

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imagination (the children's make-believe) reveals itself ironically as a means of apprehending reality (adult responsibility).

Aside from the reworking of autobiographical materials, the story's interest lies in its handling of point of view. Julia's naive language and limited apprehension, conveyed through a perfectly adapted free indirect style, expose the disharmony between the meaning of event and experience and her interpretation of them:

Once when they were living in very dingy rooms in a street near the Oval a lady came from the Ministry to ask why Julia was not at school. Daddy seemed very pleased to see her and laughed and talked a lot. When the lady went away she said she was so glad she had been able to help. But after she had gone Daddy was very angry and they had moved the next day. (p. 9)

The rendering of the child's limited cognitive and linguistic capacities, the means through which the narrative is filtered, heightens the reader's awareness of the gap between the storyteller's acute and full understanding of his tale and the deliberate naïveté of its telling. As in "Raspberry Jam" the story's center articulates a sympathetic and compassionate rendering of a child's vulnerability to the adult world. At the same time Wilson creates this sympathy, the comic treatment of the "misunderstanding" Mr. Chalperts and Mrs. Gregoby arrive at through their self-centeredness and cynicism—character traits that yield a limited apprehension of "the world" while nonetheless pretending to a masterful manipulation of it—modulates and perhaps even slightly undercuts it. The children's miming of a world beyond their apprehension mirrors the adults' insufficient knowledge of each other, and, ultimately, of themselves.

"Unwanted Heroine" (1954) depicts the slow coming-to-awareness of the self-dramatizing Rosalind, who decides to put off marriage with James, a Cambridge history lecturer, for the sake of her stepmother, Anne. As it turns out, Anne has her own plans to marry Reggie Sinclair, who Rosalind sees as a "rich son of a rich business man . . . unbearably vulgar with his flashy good looks and sports cars" (p. 127). Finding her sacrifice unwanted, Rosalind does marry James, whose maturity helps her to see her self-preoccupation, but the Joycean epiphany occurs only in the final scene as Anne's attitude and comments reveal that role-playing and egotism masquerading as concern for others have no purchase in adult life and relationships. Although the story hits on major Wilson preoccupations, the absence of distancing devices—the bittersweet humor and irony characteristic of his best work—tends to undermine its potential force. Rosalind's egotism and neurotic

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self-concern are depicted on too small a canvas, and the other characters, perhaps appropriately given her self-absorption, remain peripheral and sketched in. As so often with Wilson, the protagonist's moral education is worked out in the confrontation between the world of self (and selfishness) and the adult world of awareness and responsibility. The major metaphor of the story—the theater—that sustained illusion where self-gratification is essential for the actor—functions as a moral yardstick: Rosalind's heroics are not only unwanted by Anne but ought to be unwanted by Rosalind herself.

"Her Ship Came Home" (1955), another story featuring the tensions of childhood's partial awareness of adult realities, dissects a failed adult relationship. During his 1922 Christmas holidays spent with an aunt at the Osprey Court, a residential hotel " 'on the other side of the Park,' " the narrator is befriended by the Lestelles, a couple past their prime living in the hope that Mr. Lestelle's Uncle Ted in Australia will die so that they can inherit. In order to prick his wife's social pretensions and those of the Osprey Court set, Mr. Lestelle announces that their ship has come home: Uncle Ted has died. Later when Mr. Lestelle reveals that his announcement is a practical joke his wife spirits away the narrator's plasticine, making with it "a great wax doll" into whose head she sticks Mr. Lestelle's hair and through whose left side she has thrust "a long hat pin." Mr. Lestelle dies not from drink, as might be expected, but suddenly of a heart attack. By one of fate's ironies, Uncle Ted dies a week later. A mixture of naïveté and insight allows the narrator to conclude that, "In any case, Mrs. Lestelle's ship came home."

Although preoccupied with family and surrogate family relationships, the autobiographical elements of "Animals or Human Beings" (1955) are more distanced. Deliberately evoking generic conventions, the story fully realizes Wilson's argument that the modern horror story ought to abandon the practice of its nineteenth-century antecedents in placing horror in the unknown and find it instead in "the hysteria, the melancholy, the bitterness turned to malevolence that lie in our homes."¹⁰ Fräulein Partenkirchen, a familiar Wilson type, an outsider with a marginal existence in the great world and a tenuous hold on it—a kind of child—is sent to England by her family under the pretense of her acquiring English to obtain a secretarial post. But in reality they hope she finds herself a husband, and, in truth, they simply want "to be rid of her" (p. 265). Destined, then, to serve as housekeeper to a Miss Alice Ingelow living in the Welsh marshes, an animal lover quite "crazy" (p. 266) about the subject of vivisection, Fräulein Partenkirchen first

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encounters her new employer through Mrs. Gosport, a Jamesian intermediary who greets the German girl in London. Their conversation gives the story its title as Mrs. Gosport focuses on Miss Ingelow's partiality for animals in preference to "so much *human* material in need of help . . ." (p. 266). On her arrival, the Fräulein is immediately introduced to Maria, delivered of a litter of which their father, Rufus, is "jealous." Jealousy and partiality for birds force "Auntie" to confine him to a cage, but to Fräulein Partenkirchen, who, she hopes, *likes* animals she praises his "beautiful coat," "fine tail," and "magnificent whiskers" (p. 268). Walking downstairs alone, the Fräulein leaves a note saying she does not like animals, and as she leaves the decaying house through its neglected garden hears "two loud shrieks" announcing Miss Ingelow's fate:

Upstairs, Miss Ingelow lay on the floor with her throat torn open. An enormous buck rat was hissing and scratching at the wires of a cage. It wanted to get its doe and devour the young ones. Soon it would have eaten all the raw meat that Miss Ingelow had brought with her; and as she had closed the door of the room behind her, there would be nothing then for Rufus to devour except Miss Ingelow herself. But the little bells she had put on his cage jangled merrily. (p. 269)

Returning home "more reserved and her skin more sallow" (p. 270), Fräulein Partenkirchen tells a story that, to her relatives' distress, even lessens her chances of making a match. Suggesting that "there was always the chance that she had seen ghosts," they attempt to console themselves with her "echt Deutsch quality uniting her with all the old Legenden and Märchen. But hardly if all she could see was ghost rats!" (p. 270).

The pattern of rejection followed by violence is common enough in Wilson's work, operating powerfully, for example, in "A Bit off the Map" and *Hemlock and After*, but the violence is displaced here: although the placid Fräulein takes no revenge herself upon her family for her isolation and abandonment, the story's action does so: the mother surrogate is devoured by her own obsession, a retribution for her neglect of human beings. (Indeed, the neglected garden—always a significant metaphor in Wilson—also serves to symbolize both her lack of interest in and alienation from a world outside her own.) The family complex is also embodied in the rat family with Rufus, the "jealous" father, wanting to eat his own young. At the end, the unlikelihood of the Fräulein's finding a husband may serve partly as her unstated refusal to participate in the brutalities of the family situation itself—

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although the penalty of refusing is that she, like Miss Ingelow, becomes an eccentric in her indifference as the older woman had by her cloying and ultimately self-destructive sentimentalism.

In common with "The Men with Bowler Hats," the story succeeds by its manipulation of a naive and not wholly aware heroine. And the management of tone, achieving emotional distance from character and event, reserves the ending's full horror for the reader alone. Even the reader's initial assumption that Rufus and Maria are cats is a narrative deception permitted because of the limitations of the Fräulein's interest in life: she chooses neither animals nor human beings, while Miss Ingelow's horrific death, obliterating the choice the title offers, forces the reader into emotional response—repulsion and disgust for the animals, and some measure of pity and sympathy, despite their irresponsible innocence, for the eccentric women. Wilson's stated aim in his early stories was to deprive both his characters and his readers of emotional response; here, without uniting brutality of action and symbol, he allows it and has diminished the story's effect.¹¹

"Mrs. Peckover's Sky . . ." (1955) also features a self-obsessed heroine. The story opens as the anonymous narrator down for a weekend with a rather boring but rich Oxford colleague is initiated into one family circle. Roy's sister Joan proves uninteresting, and Roy's father, "a very amateurish local historian," a bore, but the exquisite home pleasures his aesthetic sense and its hostess charms and fascinates him, even enlivening the other members of the Peckover family. Mrs. Peckover's is an unkind spell, however, for it rests on a thoroughgoing egotism: "everything—animal, mineral and vegetable—in that place, including her family and servants, was hers." Her possessiveness extends not only to the view but even to the sunset itself. Later, informed of rumors of war, she claims "I shouldn't allow such a messy, unpleasant thing." Visiting Bugloss Hall in 1944, the narrator sees only Mrs. Peckover—Roy is away with the forces, Mr. Peckover has been killed in a tank, Joan has married. The sunset and sky still cooperate, but Mrs. Peckover's bright manner cannot mask the fact that she is "old and miserable," and to the narrator's expression of sincere happiness at seeing her there, she brutally replies: "I'm not. I wish I was dead." Her wish comes true enough; when the narrator is in Cairo, Mrs. Peckover is "killed with a lot of other old ladies by a bomb that fell on a Knightsbridge hotel."

"Mrs. Peckover's Sky . . ." contains in embryo a number of motifs Wilson develops in *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*: the young Gerald Middleton's fascination with Elvira Portway, the sense of surrogate family, the local

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historian, Elvira's attempt to ward off ugliness and death by brightness and charm. The story's link to "Aunt Cora" is also obvious. What is, however, particularly noteworthy is its displaced violence: the title character's death related in that final, brutal sentence callously dismisses it, Mrs. Peckover's saccharine-sweet vision, and the mother-surrogate relationship. Somewhat in the manner of Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, disillusion lurks behind the narrator's rejection of the Peckovers, and his greater maturity and experience allow him a complete appreciation of the inadequacy of Mrs. Peckover's vision. But here insight fails to become compassion, and the narrator's rhetoric ultimately reveals only his own moral failure.

"My Husband Is Right" (1961), although it contains echoes of "Ten Minutes to Twelve," represents a marked shift in tone from most of Wilson's later stories, differing as well in its original purposes as the prologue—one of his favored devices—to an abandoned novel, *Goats and Compasses*, of which only it and one chapter was completed.¹² Although it has a vignette quality, the piece possesses sufficient weight to stand alone. Set in Bruges, it focuses exclusively on a few hours in the life of an anonymous middle-aged couple who have gone abroad in an attempt to preserve the husband's sanity. Again, Wilson's own family context replete with his parents' histrionic quarrels provides part of the story's personal background, and *No Laughing Matter* obviously takes up some of the fragments dropped here.¹³ (Wilson's own nervous breakdown in 1944, caused partly by a disastrous love affair, contributes to the authentic note of desperation and of a relationship gone awry.) Although momentarily "unfaithful" to her husband's needs in her own selfish preoccupation, the wife affirms her commitment to him when she collects their belongings from the hotel in which he has just made a "scene": *Mon mari a raison.* The statement allies her to his "correct" attitude toward the concierge and porter, but ironically underlines the entire situation's problem: her husband's "reason," his sanity, is indeed in question. The detailing of action and the precise observation of social realities, at times indulged in for their own sake in some of the early stories, is never less than purposeful here, displaying a technical maturity won through working in the more extended form of the novel.

"The Eyes of the Peacock" (1975), which Wilson has called a "children's story," recalls Wilde's excursions in the same genre, particularly "The Canterville Ghost," but aside from relying on some children's literature conventions—a fairy godmother figure incarnated here by a formidable but benevolent great-aunt (an obvious reworking of the Aunt Cora figure), a boy hero, and a ghost—the story addresses

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itself to an exclusively adult audience.¹⁴ Set "once upon a time when King George the Fifth and his gracious Queen Mary ruled in England, and a big dark man like a bullfrog called Mussolini ruled in Italy" (p. 58), a significant blending of fantasy and realism, the tale moves rapidly from Armistead Castle—which Stephen takes particular delight in exploring—to his Great-aunt Cara's "glorious Venice." As Cara, a former opera singer, nourishes Stephen's imagination in opposition to his practical parents, the boy comes to dream of presenting a ballet when he grows up. The tale closes with Cara's disappearance in the Venice of the black shirts. (Has she too been a ghost, like the one she and Stephen are alone privileged to see at Armistead Castle?) Thanks to a legacy from her Stephen accomplishes his childhood dream, putting on *The Eyes of the Peacock*, and "although it wasn't put on at Covent Garden or anywhere important, it *was* performed" (p. 63).

Crowded with incident to the bursting point, the story is primarily interesting for its parallels with *Setting the World on Fire* (1980), published some four years later. "The Eyes of the Peacock" anticipates the novel's characters, situations, and themes: Great-aunt Cara evolves into Lady Mosson; Stephen becomes Piers, and his parents play the role of Tom; Armistead Castle becomes Tothill House; the ballet becomes Lully's opera *Phaeton*. Even the novel's opposition between imagination and practicality and its political atmosphere of anarchism and terrorist activity are rehearsed here. Weighed down by its artist-parable thesis, however, the tale lacks a genuinely fictional inspiration, although, as always, Wilson adeptly conveys mood, and in Cara offers a brilliant caricature of the world of the late Twenties and early Thirties in the manner of *For Whom the Cloche Tolls*. Stephen, the child hero whose alienation from the actual world permits rich compensation in the world of fantasy, a figure met repeatedly (Julia in "The Men with Bowler Hats," Johnnie in "Raspberry Jam," the Matthews children in *No Laughing Matter*), affirms the centrality of the theme of the imagination and the child symbol in Wilson's fiction. As in other stories or in the novels, the isolated central figure accompanies his search for self-affirmation and balance, the quest to resolve the conflicting claims of "life" and "art," against a background of threat or actual brutality (here the black shirts). Although neither fully worked out nor convincingly portrayed, Stephen's uncertain status in the real world (indicated mostly by his Oedipal game leg) is balanced by the reality of his inner one, which is constellated as he achieves his dream: "it *was* performed."

"The Eyes of the Peacock" represents a double return to childhood

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in method and subject, and confirms again by its narrative displacements the sources of Wilson's art in his own early life. The legacy of these years—a dramatizing imaginative capacity—finds its embodiment in an appropriately domestic (if distinctly undomesticated) muse—Great-aunt Cara/Aunt Cora. And the portrait of artist tutored and protected by his *femme inspiratrice* (revealingly neither a beloved nor a wife but an aunt, a parental relation) gains strength and resonance from reference to archetypal situations. Even if the story remains largely a rehearsal for the longer work that followed, its wounded hero who conquers loneliness and fear (the black shirts) by aspiring to Art transcends Wilson's personal crises and history, speaking powerfully to the artist's condition and to his eternal battle with the twin demons of conformity and bourgeois life. Given the concerns and method of "The Eyes of the Peacock," it is hardly surprising that Wilson's next imaginative work, *Setting the World on Fire*, should be a full-scale retelling of myth.

These uncollected stories, though separated widely in time, nonetheless occupy a confined and delimited space. Indeed, their main value may lie in suggesting the essential fact that however wide the grasp of Wilson's imagination and the range of his social interests they possess a kind of homing instinct that finally returns them to their origins in his early life. Even in the later novels where echoes of his childhood and adolescence seem more distant, where academics and students, the aristocracy, the extremely wealthy are "done"—social situations and character types that extend his range in truly Dickensian fashion—the bedrock remains much the same. To say this, however, is not to diminish Wilson's considerable achievement either in the short story or the novel. But revealing this essential situation highlights the necessity of Wilson's turning to the more extended form, a form that his creative exuberance inevitably came to demand as, for example, the overcrowded landscape of "The Eyes of the Peacock" amply demonstrates. Moreover, this realization also serves to increase our appreciation of the tautness and concision of his early work.

A focus on the uncollected stories of the 1950s, whatever their individual interest and value, puts into relief the formal mastery and almost startling social and psychological realism of the stories collected in *The Wrong Set* and *Such Darling Dodos*. And by calling attention to the disjunctions between the opposed worlds of fairy tale and fascist politics, "The Eyes of the Peacock" serves to expose Wilson's fundamental optimism, which continues to insist, despite overwhelming

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evidence to the contrary, that fantasy and the imagination are as real and as strong as the forces opposing them.

¹ The stories were published as follows:

"Aunt Cora," *Contact*, 1, No. 1 (May-June 1950), 31.

"An Elephant Never Forgets," *Panorama and Harlequin*, No. 5 (Spring/Summer 1951), 30-35.

"Who for Such Dainties?", *The Pick of Today's Short Stories*, 3rd ser., selected by John Pudney (London: Odhams, 1952), pp. 232-36.

"Aunt Mathilde's Drawings," *Evening Standard*, 5 March 1952, p. 8.

"Silent Pianist," *Evening Standard*, 11 Sept. 1952, p. 8.

"The Men with Bowler Hats," *Evening News*, 5 May 1953, p. 9; rpt. as "Men with Bowler Hats," *Argosy*, Nov. 1957, pp. 105-09.

"Unwanted Heroine," *Homes and Gardens*, March 1954, pp. 38-40, 124, 127, 129.

"Her Ship Came Home," *Evening Standard*, 9 May 1955, p. 19; rpt. in *Did It Happen? Stories* (London: Oldbourne, 1956), p. 211-16.

"Animals or Human Beings," *The Third Ghost Book*, ed. Cynthia, Lady Asquith (London: Barrie, 1955), pp. 265-70; rpt. London: Pan, 1957, pp. 224-28.

"Mrs. Peckover's Sky . . .," *Evening Standard*, 13 Dec. 1955, p. 19.

All citations are to a story's first publication. I am grateful to Messrs. A. C. Garrett and B. A. Pike for sharing publication data about some of these stories with me and to Dr. Joseph Kissane for useful suggestions about an earlier version of this essay. For publication details see also J. H. Stape and Anne N. Thomas, *Angus Wilson: A Bibliography, 1947-1987* (London: Mansell, 1987).

² Angus Wilson, "My Husband Is Right," *Texas Quarterly*, 4, No. 3 (1961), 139-45; "The Eyes of the Peacock," *Sunday Times Magazine* (London), 14 Dec. 1975, pp. 58-59, 61, 63.

³ Philippe Jullian, "Cinq croquis d'Angus Wilson," *Cahiers des Saisons* (Paris), 40 (hiver 1965), 538-41.

⁴ Angus Wilson, *The Wild Garden or Speaking of Writing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1963), pp. 66-67.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁶ Malcolm Bradbury, "The Short Stories of Angus Wilson," *Studies in Short Fiction*, 3 (Winter 1966), 121.

⁷ Jay L. Halio, *Angus Wilson* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), p. 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹ Averil Gardner, "Early Life and Times," *Angus Wilson* (Boston: Twayne, 1985), pp. 1-11.

¹⁰ Angus Wilson, "Images of Horror: The Unknown and Familiar," *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 Feb. 1955, p. iv. (Unsigned.)

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¹¹ Wilson, *The Wild Garden*, p. 28.

¹² F. P. W. McDowell and E. Sharon Graves, *The Angus Wilson Manuscripts in the University of Iowa Libraries* (Iowa City: Friends of the Univ. of Iowa Libraries, 1969), p. 14.

¹³ Joseph Kissane, "Talking with Angus Wilson," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29 (Summer 1983), 146.

¹⁴ "Sri Lankan Journal," *Reflections in a Writer's Eye: Travel Pieces by Angus Wilson* (New York: Viking, 1986), p. 174.

Food, Cooking, and Eating in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*

JAMES P. GILROY

As all readers of his novel are aware, Proust presents a two-sided vision of the world. People and things have both a physical appearance (a *paraître*) and an invisible essence (an *être*). It is possible to discover in everyday reality a hidden meaning. By perceiving this underlying poetry, one can enter into contact with true being. Often it is the most commonplace objects surrounding us that provide a key to the beyond, the realm of beauty and truth.

In the course of his experiences, Proust's narrator catches glimpses of essential reality in such varied things as the hawthorn flowers of spring, gothic churches, and chamber music. Food as well enables him on many occasions to enter the magical kingdom of the beautiful, for he is perceptive enough to discern the essence of things beyond their external covering. An example of such perspicacity on his part is his impressionistic description of the asparagus prepared by Françoise in the kitchen at Combray, a description inspired by a painting by Manet.¹ His evocation of their many layers of meaning for him bespeaks wonderment as well as a sense of humor. Their stalks appear like celestial sylphs or disguised goddesses because of their brilliant colors ("iridiscences which are not of this world"). These creatures have seemingly transformed themselves into vegetables in order to communicate with people, and their "precious essence" makes of his chamber pot the setting for a Shakespearian farce.²

In all his discussions of cooking as an art form, the narrator will combine the serious and the comic as he does in this passage. Beneath the irony, however, he constantly reveals a deep appreciation for the link between the achievements of cooks and his own artistic ambitions.

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J. M. Cocking has said that "Some of Proust's poetry is sublimated gastronomy."³ This is indeed true. Food is for Proust an important component of the aesthetic domain and can be enjoyed in that regard like painting, music, and literature. In several passages, cooking is directly associated with other artistic endeavors by a kind of Baudelairean *correspondance* or synesthesia. At the hotel in Rivebelle, for example, the abundance of foodstuffs with which the tables are laden reminds the narrator of banqueting scenes in the Bible as depicted in Flemish paintings (III, 1, 127-28). The chocolate cakes served at the Swann's are built like Asiatic castles and fortresses, and the adolescent narrator helps Gilberte to demolish them (II, 1, 107). The ices of the Ritz Hotel are a source of delight for Albertine and provide something of a course in architectural history. Each flavor is prepared in a mold which recalls some motif from Egyptian, Roman, or Italian architecture (V, 1, 170-72).

In another episode, the hero tries to find in the real table and food spread before him the same pictorial qualities he had enjoyed in some still-life paintings by Elstir. He is thereby putting into practice the lesson of Impressionism learned from his contemplation of that artist's works, namely that one must recognize poetry in the most banal subjects, where one least expects to find it: "I tried to find beauty in places where I had never imagined it could be found, in the most ordinary things" (II, 3, 139-40).

The pleasure derived from good food can be enhanced by the beauty of the receptacle in which it is served. Such is the case in the pastiche of the Goncourt journal near the beginning of *Le Temps retrouvé*. The brill in white sauce which has been served to the Verdurins and their guests is a delight to eye and palate because of the unusually fine ingredients, the freshest fish and first quality butter, with which it was made. "It is an amusement for the imagination of the eye and also . . . for the imagination of what used to be called the mug [mouth]" (VII, 1, 27). The excellence of the ingredients is matched, however, by the beauty of the Chinese porcelain dish in which the brill is brought to table. The aesthetic value of the platter is linked to that of food, for the scene painted upon it depicts lobsters against a sunset. In addition, its handle is made up of a Chinaman catching a fish that is so artistically rendered as to be "an enchantment of nacreous color" (VII, 1, 28). The art of the ceramist has been indissolubly joined with that of the Verdurins' chef to create a composite aesthetic impression which appeals to several senses. A similar *correspondance* occurs in the same passage. The potatoes in the salad are said to have the firmness of

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Japanese ivory buttons and the luster of Chinese ivory spoons (VII, 1, 27).

The enjoyment of food is sometimes associated by the narrator with meteorological phenomena. Thus the bright pink of a setting sun reminds him of the salmon he will have for dinner (II, 3, 54). The anticipated pleasure of luncheon at the Swanns sensitizes him to the beauty of the Parisian winter landscape (II, 1, 134). The haloed sky over Combray at sunset evokes before his mind's eye the related image of the fire in Tante Léonie's kitchen, where Françoise is roasting a chicken which will later afford him as poetic a delight as his walk along Swann's way (I, 1, 186).

Perhaps the most telling instance of this gastronomical synesthesia takes place in *La Prisonnière*. Albertine is residing with the narrator in his family's apartment within the Guermantes mansion. From it she can hear the cries of the street vendors of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. She wishes to purchase something from all of them so that Françoise can prepare a dinner that will commemorate their pleasure in listening to these merchants. This meal will be a crystallization of their joy, a tangible expression of the old-time ambience of the neighborhood. Françoise is called upon to make up a poem out of foods instead of words. As Albertine puts it: " 'It will be all the noises we heard transformed into a good meal' " (V, 1, 168). The synesthetic nature of the experience which she is seeking is made more explicit in a later passage where she makes a direct connection between the enjoyment of music and that of food: " 'What I like about those foods which are cried out is that something heard like a rhapsody changes its nature at table and appeals to my palate' " (V, 1, 170).

At certain privileged moments, the narrator's vision of the beautiful and timeless is less fleeting than in the preceding passages. Yet, even the most profound revelations of essential truth can be inspired by activities associated with the consumption of food. The leading example of such an experience is the well-known madeleine scene in "Combray," which needs little introduction. Let us merely point out that the joyful liberation from contingency and temporality experienced by the narrator in this episode is induced by food and drink. The taste of the morsels of cake soaking in the spoonful of tea awakens memories lying deep within his subconscious and brings his entire childhood in Combray back to life. His snack becomes the occasion for a major spiritual revelation, an epiphany in the Joycean sense.

The narrator makes clear that it is the memory of the senses, or

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"involuntary" memory, which is responsible for his revelation, and not the "voluntary" memory of the intelligence. The senses have a more direct link with the soul's depths than the rational faculties. Memories are preserved in our bodily senses long after the intelligence has lost sight of them. Ironically, it is our most delicate and seemingly fragile senses, those of taste and smell, which are the most persevering and zealous keepers of our past experiences. Of course, these are the senses most directly involved with the action of eating:

But, when nothing subsists from an ancient past, after the death of beings, after the destruction of things, alone, more frail but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, smell and taste remain for a long time, like souls, recalling each other, waiting, hoping, upon the ruin of everything else, bearing without flinching, upon their almost impalpable minuteness, the immense structure of memory. (I, 1, 70)

The religious connotations of the madeleine cookies are well known. Their shape recalls the scallop shells worn during the Middle Ages by pilgrims bound for the shrine of Saint James in Compostela. Proust deliberately exploits this sacred history of his little cake or "cockleshell of pastry." He emphasizes its "severe and devout pleating" and its appearance of having been molded "in the grooved valve of a scallop shell" (I, 1, 67-70). His madeleine is not only the symbol but the actual inspiration for his spiritual pilgrimage toward true being and its artistic expression.⁴

In the last part of *Le Temps retrouvé*, the narrator undergoes an even more illuminating epiphany, or rather a succession of revelations which enable him to discover his vocation as a writer. Here again, a present sensation evokes a similar one from his past and reveals to him thereby the unity and permanence of his inner self. The epiphanies granted to the narrator upon his visit to the Prince and Princess de Guermantes embrace all types of sense impressions and are not limited to those of taste and smell, as in the madeleine scene. Food and drink nonetheless play an important role in the later episode. A major revelation is again unleashed by a snack, this time the petits fours and orangeade which a butler serves him while he is waiting to enter the drawing room. As he wipes his mouth with a napkin, its rough texture recalls to him a similar sensation he had known in the dining room of the hotel in Balbec. Suddenly, a seascape reminiscent of Monet is conjured up before him as if by magic. The peacock blues and greens of the sea are mentally superimposed by him upon the Guermantes' bookshelves (VII, 2, 10-11). Moments before, he had heard the sound of a spoon struck

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against a plate in the butler's pantry, yet another sensation associated with eating and the preparation of food. This sound likewise resurrected a segment of his past by reminding him of a train trip he had once taken (VII, 2, 10). Like the tactile impression of the napkin, the sensation of hearing also fills him with joy, for it has again freed him from time.

Françoise, in her role as the cook for Tante Léonie and later for the narrator and his parents, has the right to take her place beside the great artists of Proust's novel—Bergotte, Elstire, Vinteuil, and La Berma. Her creations in the culinary domain become, like theirs, a symbol of the novel which the narrator decides to write. Like them, she is a delegate of the author. She creates something beautiful out of the raw materials of her medium, that is, edible foodstuffs. She makes of them objects of delight which can be shared with other people, thus bringing about a communion of spirits which is one of the principal purposes of art, according to Proust. Cooking is her art form, and in it she gives the best of herself. Cooking enables her to transcend the intellectually limited and rather nasty individual who is her everyday self.

The dishes she produces at Combray are described as "culinary masterpieces" (I, 1, 169–70). Her chocolate cream is "an occasion piece in which she had put all her talent," an "inspiration" (I, 1, 104). The family recognizes her greatness and responds with an appropriate degree of respect:

Whoever would have refused to taste it, saying: "I have finished, I am no longer hungry," would have immediately debased himself to the level of one of those vulgarians who, even when an artist makes them a present of one of his works, looks at the weight and material when it is only the artist's intent and signature which have any value. To leave even one drop of it in the plate would have demonstrated the same impoliteness as to get up before the end of a musical piece in the very presence of the composer. (I, 1, 104)

If Proustian commentators have neglected to give Françoise due credit for her talents, it is perhaps because of the comic exaggeration with which the narrator speaks of them and which is evident in the passages quoted. There is a paradoxical combination of genuine admiration and sly mockery in his presentation of this character. He finds her personal foibles amusing when not too alarming. However, as we shall see, he also compares his own literary ambitions with her achievements and regards her as a kindred spirit. She has all the traits

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of a successful artist, but his description of her remains within the comic mode.

There is for Proust something sacred in all artistic enterprises, for true artists aspire to partake of the eternal. Françoise is no exception, and it is fitting that there be a religious aura surrounding her activities in the kitchen. As she puts the finishing touches on her Sunday dinner in Combray, she seems a larger-than-life figure with supernatural powers. The young narrator finds her in the kitchen "commanding the forces of nature which had become her assistants, as in fairy tales where giants hire themselves out as cooks" (I, 1, 169). She is a high priestess of cuisine, and her vocation is of an almost ecclesiastical nature. Her menus follow the rhythm of the seasons like the church's liturgical calendar as depicted in the sculptures adorning gothic cathedrals (I, 1, 103). Her kitchen, which is her artist's studio, looks like "a little temple of Venus" (I, 1, 105). The farmers in the vicinity offer her the first fruits of their fields as to a goddess of the harvest, and her larder "was filled to bursting with the offerings of the dairy, fruit, and vegetable merchants" (I, 1, 105).

According to Diderot, in *Le Neveu de Rameau*, most geniuses have a sinister or even wicked side to their personalities that counterbalances their life-giving creative impulses.⁵ Françoise is again no exception. The streak of cruelty in her nature can be seen in the way she kills the chickens that will later become so delicious through her culinary efforts (I, 1, 171). Moreover, during an entire summer, she serves asparagus nearly every day because she wants to get rid of the pregnant scullery maid who has to pare the stalks and who is very allergic to them (I, 1, 174). Thus the same vegetables which inspire such rapture in the young hero owe their *raison d'être* to the cook's paranoia and unkindness. Such an incongruous combination of creativity and cruelty in one person reminds him of some historical and artistic parallels: "I noticed little by little that the sweetness, gravity, and virtues of Françoise concealed some back-kitchen tragedies, just as history reveals that the reigns of the Kings and Queens, who are portrayed with their hands clasped in prayer in the stained-glass windows of churches, were marked by bloody incidents" (I, 1, 172). Here, as in other situations throughout the novel, Proust realizes that the underside of reality is not always a pretty sight.

Françoise has her greatest moment of glory when Monsieur de Norpois is invited to dinner at the Paris apartment of the narrator's parents. The dinner she prepares for this occasion (which consists of a York ham, jellied *boeuf à la mode*, a pineapple and truffle salad, and

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Nesselrode pudding) is a work of art like Elstir's landscapes and Vinteuil's sonata. The episodes of this dinner and its preparation, occurring near the beginning of *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur*, are of considerable length. Every detail of this " 'Lucullan feast,' " as Norpois calls it (II, 1, 53), is lovingly described by the narrator. However, the latter once again maintains the ironic tone, at once admiring and deprecating, he usually adopts when speaking of Françoise.

A mock-heroic leitmotiv throughout the episode is the comparison he makes between Françoise as she prepares the great dinner and Michelangelo sculpting the monument to Pope Julius II in Rome. During the days preceding the dinner, she lives "in the effervescence of creation" (II, 1, 26). She goes to the Halles herself in order to select the best ingredients, and she attaches "an extreme importance to the intrinsic quality of the materials which would enter into the making of her work" (II, 1, 26). In this regard she is likened to her Italian predecessor, who spent eight months in Carrara choosing the finest blocks of marble for his statue of Moses. She puts so much effort into her preparations that the narrator's mother fears she might suffer nervous exhaustion, "like the sculptor of the Tomb of the Medicis in the quarries of Pietraganta" (II, 1, 26). She cooks her ham "protected by bread-crumbs like pink marble" (II, 1, 26). When the big evening arrives, she serves her dinner with the self-confidence of the "Michelangelo of our kitchen," and Norpois recognizes her achievement by comparing her to Vatel (II, 1, 43).

Françoise acts and expresses herself like the great artist she is. She goes about her cooking duties "with the ardent self-confidence of great creators" (II, 1, 26). It may be noted that her self-confidence is in marked contrast with the doubts and vacillations of the young narrator as he tries to decide upon a career in letters. She is completely lacking in his stifling self-consciousness. She receives Norpois's compliments "with the proud simplicity, the joyful and—for the moment—intelligent look of an artist to whom one speaks of his/her art" (II, 1, 77). She can discuss the famous chefs and restaurants of the period as an equal. Not the least intimidated by their fame, she evaluates their worth with ruthless candor: "Françoise was for famous chefs a more terrible 'colleague' than the most envious and conceited actress. We felt, however, that she had a sure sense of her art and respect for traditions" (II, 1, 79). Her cavalier assessment of the celebrated Café Anglais shows how difficult it is to impress her. She describes this establishment as " 'a restaurant which seems to have a nice little middle-class cookery' " (II, 1, 79–80).

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The part of Françoise's dinner which arouses the most intense interest on the narrator's part is her jellied beef with carrots. This dish becomes for him, like the church in Combray and Vinteuil's septet, a symbol of the book which he will eventually write. Proust envisions the artist as a distiller of essences, as one who penetrates the surface of reality in order to capture its inner substance. The length and complexity of the Proustian sentence reflect his ambition to absorb the spiritual richness of the world into words and thereby communicate it to others. The artist renders the unseen content of being and puts it into a form that can be grasped by the senses.

The narrator admires Françoise because she cooks the same way he writes. She uses meat, bones, and vegetables as he uses words. The ambition of both is to create an organic and unified whole out of their respective raw materials. Norpois congratulates her for her extraordinary fusing of all her ingredients: " 'a braised beef . . . in which the beef has taken on the flavor of the carrots, it is admirable!' " (II, 1, 43). Her beef has absorbed the savor of the carrots and made it a part of its own substance, just as an artist seeks to capture the essence of reality in words, paint, or musical notes. The beef transmits this savor to the diner's palate much as the work of art communicates the artist's message to his public. As Françoise puts it: " 'The beef must become like a sponge, then it drinks up all the stock all the way to the bottom' " (II, 1, 79).

Françoise's *boeuf à la mode* is again mentioned, much later in the work, in the course of the narrator's long meditations on art in *Le Temps retrouvé*. Françoise's memorable dish is among his models for the novel he plans to write. He does not want his book to be a superficial reflection of everyday reality but an expression of the true reality which is invisible. He does not wish merely to describe the real persons and places he has encountered in his personal life. Instead, he will create composite characters and locales which will incarnate essential aspects of humanity and the world. Out of the diverse phenomena of his experiences he will invent figures of a mythical depth and unity, just as Françoise made her jellied beef out of ingredients that were at first distinct:

Moreover, since individualities (human or otherwise) would in this book be made up of numerous impressions which, taken from many young ladies, many churches, and many sonatas, would serve to constitute a single sonata, church, or young lady, would I not be writing my book the way Françoise made her braised beef, which Monsieur de Norpois so appreciated, and the

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aspic of which had been enriched by so many added and well chosen pieces of meat. (VII, 2, 236)⁶

This passage recalls an earlier one in "Combray," in which the narrator points out how much more sympathy one has for fictional characters than for real people. The former do not have the opaqueness of the latter because they are made up entirely of immaterial elements which the reader can make a part of his own being, "since we have made them our own, since they are produced in ourselves" (I, 1, 122). Here again there is a reminder, or rather an anticipation, of Françoise's beef. The novelist creates transparent and assimilable figures out of the incomprehensible individualities of real life. This action is comparable to Françoise's transformation of pieces of meat and vegetable into a clear and savory aspic which can then be integrated into the personal being of the diner.

The narrator accords Françoise the supreme compliment by recognizing her as a fellow artist. He thinks that she is in a better position to understand his joy in writing than many so-called intellectuals. "Françoise, on the contrary, sensed my happiness and respected my work" (VII, 2, 235).

The metaphor is a key element in Proust's conception of literature. He felt that when an author compares two apparently different things, he liberates and gives expression to the eternal essence which is common to both (VII, 2, 39). Proust often has recourse to the world of cuisine to find one of the terms of comparison for his metaphors. Food products, as well as their tastes and aromas, can bring to mind a person, a place, a work of art, a play, a flower, and vice versa. For example, the narrator as a child believes that the fragrance of the hawthorns must reside in their darker-shaded areas and that the freshness of Mademoiselle Vinteuil's cheeks lies beneath her freckles. He compares both to an almond cake, the taste of which emanates from the burnt almonds added to the batter when it is baked (I, 1, 160). In a more extended metaphor, one term is Tante Léonie's room, which is so redolent of provincial domesticity and religious piety and revelatory of a hidden poetry. The various odors within the room seem to the young narrator to be baking in an oven into "an invisible yet palpable provincial cake, an immense 'turnover' " (I, 1, 76).

The narrator establishes a metaphorical relationship between Françoise and the rustic church of Saint-André-des-Champs because of the medieval soul which is common to both (I, 1, 209-10). On a less elevated level, the narrator finds in the aroma of her roast chicken an

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objective correlative of her cook's soul, or, as he puts it, "the very fragrance (essence) of her virtues" (I, 1, 171).

Such culinary metaphors are not limited to the world of Combray, however. The narrator finds parallels between people and food even within the rarified atmosphere of the Guermantes' circle. He states that Oriane's vocabulary is as savory as dishes made from the very finest ingredients and recipes for which one would find in Pampille's cookbook (III, 3, 162). He also mentions that the Guermantes' wit is as legendary as the potted meat (*rillettes*) of Tours and the pink tea biscuits of Reims (III, 3, 105).

Since art was for Proust the only true religion, and since he considered cooking to be an art form, it should be no surprise that he uses so many religious metaphors when talking about food. Especially frequent are comparisons between the act of dining and the Christian liturgy. Meals are a form of communion, a celebration of the Mass. Here again, however, we find the same combination of mocking irony and earnest seriousness with which he describes Françoise. As we shall see, his irony in this instance has an explicitly satirical purpose.

The elite group that gathers around the Duchesse de Guermantes' table at her more intimate dinners reminds the narrator of "the golden statues of the apostles in the Sainte-Chapelle, symbolical and consecrating pillars, before the Holy Table" (III, 1, 38). As we have seen, he emphasizes the priestly aspects of Françoise at work in Tante Léonie's kitchen. In addition, he says that her roast chicken, already alluded to, appears at the table "its skin embroidered with gold like a chasuble and its precious juice dripping from a ciborium" (I, 1, 171). In the same vein, Monsieur de Norpois calls her dinners in Paris "‘veritable agapes [feasts of love],’" thereby recalling the role of the Mass as a feast of brotherly love (II, 1, 43).

At the Grand-Hôtel in Balbec, the cloth is placed upon the table in the dining room "as at an altar where the rites of the epicure are celebrated" (II, 3, 140). Drops of water linger in oyster shells "as in little stone holy water founts" (II, 3, 140). On a special occasion, the manager of the hotel carves the turkeys "with a priestly majesty" and plunges his knife into their flesh like a pagan "sacrificer" seeking to read an augury in the animals' entrails (IV, 2, 298). For the manager to perform this act himself is such a rare event that it becomes the basis for a new calendar among the hotel's employees, and all future occurrences there are dated in reference to it, "like the birth of Christ or the Hegira" (IV, 2, 299).

In Paris, a butcher's apprentice separates the fillets of beef from the inferior cuts. Weighing them on a scale surmounted by a cross, he

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gives the impression of "a beautiful angel who, on Judgment Day, will prepare for God, according to their merit, the separation of the good and the evil and the weighing of souls" (V, 1, 181-82). To the narrator, the cries of the street hawkers whom Albertine enjoys so much have a rhythm resembling Gregorian chant or "the psalm-chanting of a priest during Mass." For him the street life of Paris is reminiscent of the Church's daily hours of prayer, of which it is "the good-fellow, itinerant, and semiliturgical counterpart" (V, 1, 153-56).

Food, as can be imagined, plays an important role in the social life of Paris. References to food can sometimes reveal in a unique way certain aspects of an individual's personality. The semi-artist Swann demonstrates his originality on one occasion by his ingenious idea of sending fruit to the Princesse de Parme as a birthday gift (I, 2, 129). A cousin of his selects one piece at a time with the greatest care. In another episode, Oriane shows off her celebrated wit, likened by the narrator as we have seen to the best of food, at the expense of her cousin, Zénaïde d'Heudicourt, who is giving a dinner party. The latter is so well known for her frugality that when she announces to Oriane that she will be serving "seven little queen's mouthfuls," the Duchess concludes that there will be at least eight people at table (III, 3, 144). The queen in question is Maria Leszcynska, and the dish named for her consists of patty shells filled with creamed chicken and sweetbreads.

In a more serious vein, it may be recalled that many pages of Proust's novel are devoted to the goings-on and conversations taking place at dinner parties given at the homes of the Swanns, the Verdurins, the Duc de Guermantes, the Princesse de Parme, the Prince de Guermantes, as well as the narrator's family. There are also noteworthy dinners in restaurants. As one reads these episodes, the satirical thrust of Proust's liturgical metaphors becomes increasingly apparent. "Agape" and other terms referring to the Mass are used in a highly ironical sense. Although dining may indeed be a social ritual, there is no real communion of souls, no collective partaking in a feast of charity. There is instead a meeting of mutually impenetrable solitudes. The only exchange is one of hostility and unkindness. If anyone tries to communicate with another person through love and thereby bridge the interpersonal gap, he risks being excluded from his social set.

Such is the case at different times with Swann and the narrator. Both men experience the anguish of being rejected by the person they love. In many ways, society dinners represent the antithesis of the Mass. They are more like witches' sabbaths or black masses. This is the feeling of the hero as a child when Swann's presence at dinner in Combray

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prevents his mother from giving him the eucharistic kiss without which he cannot sleep. The boy envisages the dinner taking place down below and from which he has been excluded as "an inconceivable, infernal festival . . . cruel mysteries" which are carrying away the woman he loves in a sinister whirlwind (I, 1, 48–49). Ironically, Swann, who is the involuntary cause of the child's pain, is better acquainted with such torments than anyone because of his unrequited love for Odette and the jealous possessiveness in her regard of the Verdurins.

Mention of the latter couple brings up the final irony of Proust's treatment of food and cooking. Nowhere can one find better things to eat than at the various residences of the Verdurins (VII, 1, 27). Yet, they are among the least admirable people in the entire novel, certainly more on the side of rump roast than of fillet on the butcher's scale. One may conclude therefore that in most cases, as far as Proust is concerned, the food served at France's most distinguished tables has more aesthetic and moral worth than the individuals who consume it.

¹ Cf. J. M. Cocking, *Proust: Collected Essays on the Writer and His Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), p. 138.

² Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Vols. I–VII of *Œuvres Complètes de Marcel Proust* (Paris: N.R.F., 1929–33), I, Part 1, p. 170. All further references to this work appear in the text and are indicated by volume number in Roman numerals, part number in Arabic numerals, and page number(s) in Arabic numerals. Translations of the passages quoted are by this author.

³ Cocking, *Proust*, p. 138.

⁴ Claude-Edmonde Magny speaks at length of the "pèlerinage spirituel" (spiritual pilgrimage) described in Proust's novel. Cf. Magny, *Histoire du roman français depuis 1918* (Paris: Seuil, 1950), p. 172.

⁵ Denis Diderot, *Œuvres romanesques*, édition de H. Bénac (Paris: Garnier, 1962), pp. 400–05.

⁶ Shirley King, in the introduction to her delightful cookbook, *Dining with Marcel Proust* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), p. 12, mentions, though without further comment, the importance of this passage.

The Pleasures of Rose Macaulay

J. V. GUERINOT

It is a pity that Hilary Spurling in her excellent life of Ivy Compton-Burnett put beneath the photograph of Rose Macaulay her remark, "My books won't live. Yours may, Ivy."¹ It might suggest to someone unacquainted with her work that it is not worth bothering about, and this would be a serious mistake. The remark shows only her admirable humility. Her books would give great pleasure to many to whom she is not much more than a name. Her name appears frequently in Quentin Bell's life of Virginia Woolf and in the ever-increasing books about Bloomsbury, in Hilary Spurling's *Ivy*, and most recently in Robert Liddell's *Elizabeth and Ivy*. Her cousin and literary executor, Constance Babington Smith, has given us a biography that contains all the information about her life we are likely to have.² But her books remain less well known than they deserve to be. Fortunately there are signs that she may be gaining new readers. Both her former publishers, Collins, and Virago are reprinting a number of the novels, and one hopes the reprinting will continue.

The most revealing comment Rose Macaulay ever made on her art (she took an excessively modest view of her books) was that all she was interested in when she wrote her novels was "the style—the mere English, the cadences etc.; and sometimes when I make a joke."³ And it is the style, the sentences, and the jokes that make the novels so worth reading. In a Rose Macaulay novel it is not plot, not character, that matter most, but the narrator's prose. She has little interest in making up a plot. Usually she takes a fairly simple idea or situation to focus her special vision of life: a young girl raised as a near illiterate in Andorra is suddenly faced with the London literary world (*Crewe Train*, Collins, 1926); a successful young novelist, famous for her grasp of character, goes to visit relatives in the jungles of Guatemala (*Staying with Relations*,

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Collins, 1930); a single family is followed through all the decades from 1879 to 1920 (*Told by an Idiot*, Collins, 1923).⁴ The framework serves its purpose by allowing the characters to do amusing things, to talk endlessly and the narrator to comment freely. What we enjoy is listening to the voice speaking.

What I am always aware of in reading a Rose Macaulay is that it was written by the woman in the Cecil Beaton photograph. She looks, does this elderly, gaunt, and handsome lady, rather formidable; one believes readily in the tales of her terrible tongue. She looks wise and witty and learned and courageous, a woman one would greatly like to have known. And I often think of what one of her friends said after her death: "If everyone were as good as Rose Macaulay, and also as clever, the world would be a paradise."⁵

What pleasures, then, am I suggesting that, busy as we are, we may find in that long shelf of books? (Writing for a living, she averaged a novel every other year for fifty years.) Primarily, I suggest, a sense of joy. She blesses what there is for being. She thinks the world amazing and comic. People delight her, and their so odd ways. Her books are full of laughter and wit and delight in *Abroad*, architecture, classical and modern literature, the more peculiar heresies, the England of Laud and the Cambridge Platonists, the Anglican church, and bathing. (She seems to have gone swimming in just about every body of water she saw, including a muddy pond at Sissinghurst, and daily after Mass, in the Serpentine, which rather worried T. S. Eliot.) As Laurie says at the end of *The Towers of Trebizond*, "One finds diversions; these, indeed, confront one at every turn, the world being so full of natural beauties and enchanting artifacts, of adventures and jokes and excitements and romance and remedies for grief."⁶ It is natural she should have written books entitled *The Minor Pleasures of Life* (Gollancz, 1934), *Personal Pleasures* (Gollancz, 1935), and *Pleasure of Ruins* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1953).

Then there is her fastidious care for words, her distaste for what in her Hogarth Pamphlet of that name she called "catchwords and claptrap" (Hogarth Press, 1926). When her library was totally destroyed in the bombing of London, the first volumes she replaced were the *OED*. There are these who like their novelists (and such novelists greatly abound) shirts off, muscles rippling, and those who think that the only muscles a novelist may hint at possessing are those needed to take down the wanted volume of the *OED* from its accustomed shelf.

Her novels are for those who prefer their fiction to smell agreeably of the British Library Reading Room. She was a writer of remarkable

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learning, as any reader of *Some Religious Elements in English Literature* (Hogarth Press, 1931) or *Pleasure of Ruins* will perceive. The learning, out of the way, surprising, agreeable, gives the novels their special flavor.

The novels are full of recurrent terms of approbation that suggest the quality of spirit she admired: ironic, bland, elegant, detached, celibate, urbane, rakish, scholarly, civilized. Together they compose an attitude very close to what in her excellent book on E. M. Forster (*The Writings of E. M. Forster*, Hogarth Press, 1938) she conveniently calls "Cambridge." "Cambridge," then, we may call it, or "Bloomsbury *entre deux guerres*" or, more exactly, "Marylebone." Every book presupposes ideal readers, and one way of defining a book is to summon these up. Rose Macaulay novels are for Sir Gilbert Murray, Sir John Betjeman, Archbishop David Mathew, and Elizabeth Bowen (all of them, in fact, ardent admirers).

Wit, learning, and piety, then, I would claim for her. The piety is the hardest to talk about, but all of her books were clearly written by a woman of deep religious conviction. Everyone, I suppose, who knows anything at all about her, knows that because of her love affair over many years with a married man, Gerald O'Donovan, she ceased gradually to be *pratiquante* until, after her lover's death, she returned to the Church under the guidance of the lowly Father, the Rev. John Hamilton Cowper Johnson. A most important fact in her life, but not a fact to concern the reader. She was always a Christian writer, as Robert Liddell has pointed out, correcting Ivy Compton-Burnett. Her standards for her characters, as he observes, are Christian standards.⁷ All her books testify to her abiding affection for the Church. All the teasing and joking about Buchmanites, and Billy Graham, and Bishop Colenso's arithmetic book, and Collyridianism, and Cowley fathers biting Nestorian bishops are the jokes of a Benedictine calefactory. *They Were Defeated* (Collins, 1932) in its brilliant reconstruction of Cambridge before the Civil Wars, the place of special honor in her sacred geography, is only the clearest mark of her passion for the religious thought and worship of the earlier seventeenth century, a subject on which she would often and at great length telephone to C. V. Wedgwood.

Her books are, for the most part, very gay and rather silly, excellent things for books to be in this fallen world. They are also, at times, which is a virtue as well, awash with melancholy. She knows, as does every comic novelist worth reading, that "Everything's terrible, *cara*—in the heart of man." Her heroines, particularly at night, in bed, are engulfed

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in terror, in accidie, in the bitter waves of fruitless passion. They agree with Raphael that "In loving thou dost well, in passion not," but can find no answer to their grievous plight. Nor can Rose Macaulay, nor can we. The wit, the grace, the poise, the intelligence of high civilization is built on shifting sands, as the ruins she so loved everywhere triumphantly display.

With so many books to choose from, where is one to start? I would recommend beginning with the following four books.

There are not so many good comic novels in the language that a lover of the genre can afford to miss one. *Going Abroad* (1934) is, after *The Towers of Trebizond*, Rose Macaulay's funniest and most endearing novel, a novel, as the dedication promises, "of unredeemed levity." It is the very model of an English comic novel. Against the lovely background of the Basque country and its beaches Rose Macaulay assembles English eccentrics, international crooks, and earnest, deplorably bouncy young Oxford Groupers. It begins splendidly:

Mrs. Richard Aubrey, the wife of a missionary bishop, sat outside the Café Bar Inoxion, in the Plaza de Armas, Fuenterrabia, one hot eighth of September, reconstructing, as was usual with her the Garden of Eden. . . . While her husband (a very kindly and persuasive clergyman) had striven to convert the uncultivated denizens of Mesopotamia, she, shyer, less fluent, much less convinced, and slightly unbalanced by the Mesopotamian sun, had ridden about on camels, donkeys, and other such creatures, brooding over that lost and lovely garden watered by the Tigris and the Euphrates and now so run to seed. . . . "That the Forbidden Fruit of Paradise was an Apple," she doubted with the late Sir Thomas Browne.⁸

Staying with her in the hotel at Zarauz is her husband, the Bishop of Xanadu, and Sir Arthur Denzil, a retired diplomat. Also at the hotel are Colonel and Mrs. Buckley with their children Hero and the snobbish Giles, the dreadful M. and Mme. Josef, who run an international chain of beauty parlors, and Mrs. Dixon, one of their pathetic victims whose face they long ago destroyed (not a convincing character). And everywhere in evidence is the party of young Oxford Groupers. ("Mrs. Aubrey, being Cambridge, was one of those who liked this name for them" [GA, p. 7].) These provide much of the satire, but they are really handled very gently. Ted, their leader, is a likable enough young man, and they have "a kind of bright, touching, barbaric confidence, like that of dogs and boy scouts" (GA, p. 18). What makes them so absurd is that they have arrived to convert the Basques, "Already," as the Bishop justly observes, "among the more religious of European tribes, though

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of course when you came to absolute honesty, absolute purity, and absolute unselfishness—well, no doubt they would lack all that as much as any one else” (GA, pp. 18–19). “Dear me, what a very high standard to set before themselves, thought the Bishop” (GA, p. 19).

Ted falls in love with the Byronically lovely Hero, one of Rose Macaulay’s firmly nonintellectual heroines. Ted related to her his success in beginning to Change a fisherman, Ted speaking Castilian and the fisherman Basque, although the latter thought he was speaking Castilian.

“But I don’t think it got between us. Language doesn’t actually matter terribly, do you think? I mean, there are far more important things.”

“Nearly everything,” Hero agreed.

She shares his simplicity:

“We happen to think that life matters more than books, I’m afraid. Don’t you agree?”

“Oh, yes, I suppose so.”

Such comparisons were not natural to Hero. Life. Books. Well, naturally, books scarcely mattered at all. That was easy. (GA, pp. 36–37)

The comedy of the Changing of Hero ensues. Good Macaulayesque heroine that she is, she loves swimming, and Ted and she go swimming a lot while Ted, not without difficulty, attempts to Change her. She is not one to grasp quickly the point of an exemplum, nor does the Argument from Design work well for her. They are looking out over the ocean:

“Makes one jolly well think, doesn’t it? I mean, all that can’t be just blind accident.” Had it been an accident, Hero understood, there would have been less of it.

“A bit overdone, though,” she commented. “I mean, we could have done with less, actually. . . .” (GA, p. 83)

The Oxford Groupers hold a grand meeting at the Miramar over which the kindly Bishop agrees to preside. Sir Arthur sighs on learning that Paris is now full of Groups. How different it must be from the Paris of his diplomatic days. Two young poleta players, thought by the Groupers to be confessing how they have Changed, say a few words in Basque about their national game, and, then, to the exquisite embarrassment of her very well-bred parents, Hero gets up to testify. “‘I’ve faced up to things,’” she says. “‘That dreadful expression!’” moaned the bowed mother. “‘Up to . . . so unnecessary, so American . . .’” (GA, p. 122).

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Poor Hero is indeed Changed and writes long letters to her family, sharing her past and present sins. Her parents decide they must get her to St. Jean de Luz at once. But on their return from Loyola all of the English characters and M. and Mme. Josef are kidnapped by Basque smugglers and taken off to a mountain fastness where they are kept, in great discomfort, until the Josefs will agree to pay a large ransom. The Josefs are at last, to everyone's relief, Changed, and Mme. Josef's public confession of her sins in the cosmetic industry, the Sharing we have been looking forward to, is satisfyingly lurid. The Basque kidnappers themselves are not at all Changed and find the Oxford Groupers' continual references to smuggling in the worst of taste.

The scholarly Aubreys with calm good sense make the best of their captivity, Mrs. Aubrey happily using the opportunity to improve her Basque, the bishop finding he can continue work on his book on the survival of ancient heresies among Iraqui tribes:

"I see I have with me too, my notes on semi-Pelagianism and Priscillianism among the desert Nefudian missionaries. . . . The Priscillianists combined Sabellianism, Manicheism, and Gnosticism. So did the Nefudian missionaries, whom we met in Basra. But there was also an outbreak of Adamism among them." (GA, p. 245)

All travelers must have dreamed wistfully of those linguistically carefree days when Latin, we are told, was a universal language, and many, driven by desperate circumstances, must at some time have endeavored to communicate in such Latin as they could command, but Rose Macaulay contrives an attempt at Latin conversation which for sheer zaniness has, I think, no peer. The Aubreys and Sir Arthur want very much to talk to the Basque priest who comes to visit their kidnappers to find out why they are being held and to persuade him that they must be released immediately. But the nice village curé speaks no Castilian. Surely, however, he understands Latin. Mrs. Aubrey begins by quoting relevant bits from Milton's *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano*, which she has just been reading. Sir Arthur tries Virgil's first Eclogue: "'At nos hinc. . . . But we must hence. Some to the thirsty regions of Africa . . . some to where the Britons dwell. . . .'" But Father Ignacio to such surprising and unfamiliar sentiments just keeps replying, "Ita est." The bishop sensibly decides they should, with such a poor classicist, stick to the Latin of his religious duties.

"Quare," he gently asked, "fremuerunt gentes, et populi meditati sunt inania?"

Father Ignacio recognized with pleasure this familiar inquiry

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of the psalmist despite its un-Vasco pronunciation. He did not, indeed, answer it, but obligingly assisted the bishop in his religious exercise by rapidly and nasally reciting the next verse. (GA, pp. 217-19)

The novel ends amid autumn bonfires in Cambridge gardens as Mrs. Aubrey and the bishop tranquilly pursue their respective speculations on the Garden of Eden and the survival of primitive heresies. Basque fishing villages and wild mountains, baroque churches, brigands, kidnapping, Milton and Sir Thomas Browne, several of her most lovable characters, the vagaries of patristic theology, all irradiated by wit and the most impudent insouciance. It is the perfect book for an August afternoon when we want "only a novel," but a novel that is original, amusing, urbane, and undisturbing. Delightful and wayward characters behave and misbehave against this world's created glories, while the novelist says from time to time to the fools, Deal not so madly; and to the ungodly, Set not up your horn.

Her achievement in *They Were Defeated* (1932, called in the American edition *The Shadow Flies*) is to have re-created convincingly the world of Robert Herrick, to have imagined for us seventeenth-century Devonshire and the Cambridge of the Laudian reform in a novel which is a serious and satisfying work of art. After the light comedy of the Twenties, she found this once in the historical novel—a genre perfectly suited to her temperament and abilities.

Even its divisions suggest its shape and flavor: "Bucolick," "Academick," "Antiplatonick," and "Postscript." We move from Dean Prior to Cambridge, and then back to Devonshire for the sad postscript which spells out the Royalist defeat. As Miss C. V. Wedgwood, in her fine introduction to the 1966 reprinting, accurately observes, Herrick "presides" over the book, but the plot concerns the fifteen-year-old Julian Conybeare, an eager young scholar and poet, reading the classics with her vicar Mr. Herrick since her father believes strongly in female education. Herrick, a not too wildly erring parson, is presented so successfully that we believe easily that the Herrick of the novel wrote Herrick's poems.

Amid the bucolic charm and the harvest festivals the ominous political news, the growing hatred of Laud and fear of the Scots army, Julian dreams of Cambridge where her brother Kit is, of Mr. Cleveland of St. John's, Kit's tutor, who writes "marvelous ingenious verses,"⁹ of Mr. Richard Crashaw of Peterhouse, but especially of Mr. Abraham Cowley. Sir John Suckling, who comes to visit her beloved tutor, is something of a disappointment, jealous, she suspects of Cowley, finding

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Herrick's verses distinctly out of fashion, and much more inclined to flirt with the lovely poetess than take her verses seriously.

Her atheistical father, Dr. Conybeare (modeled after Rose Macaulay's cousin, F. C. Conybeare), takes her with Parson Herrick to Cambridge to visit Kit. The fun Rose Macaulay admitted to having in thinking it up¹⁰ is obvious and catching. We learn what it was like to study at Cambridge in 1640, how the university looked, how it felt. The Cambridge Platonists, the intellectual innovations, the reformed Anglican liturgy, the metaphysical poets, the love of learning, and the desire for God—it all makes for Julian a *hortus conclusus*, a Paradise.

Waking up in the White Horse Inn on a "magical Cambridge All Hallows morning" (TWD, p. 174), Julian can hardly wait to get to church:

Oh, there were a hundred of noble clergymen, Arminian, Calvinian, and Latitudinarian, who must even now be worshipping all the saints in church or chapel, and who would later be walking abroad, and might be caught sight on as they passed. There was Dr. Beale, who had so beautified St. John's Chapel; there were Dr. Whichcote and Dr. Holdsworth and Mr. Cudworth of Emmanuel, Dr. Fuller of Queen's, and a host more. (TWD, p. 175)

Giles takes her to Little St. Mary's:

Kneeling in the little church, so dim, so charmingly aisleless, so reminiscent still of the college chapel for which it had served for three centuries until seven years back, Julian seemed to herself to have entered into another religious country from any she had trodden before. Here was a new Anglicanism, decorated with ornament, lit with tall tapers that flamed softly in brass candlesticks on the high-raised altar; a crucifix hung over the altar, and incense drifted faintly about the church. It seemed to Julian very lovely. . . . (TWD, p. 188)

And to make things even better there is Richard Crashaw sitting in the chancel, who is said to watch and pray in the church all the night sometimes and who is only kept from Popery by Little Gidding and Dr. Cosin, the Peterhouse Master.

Conybeare is delighted to send Julian to Mr. More's classes for women on Tuesday afternoons, where he expounds on the universe and the Platonical soul, and reads with them "Plato, Plotinus, Origen, Tully, and Clement, and that eximious little book, *Theologia Germanica*" (TWD, p. 272) and hopes to work them up to Descartes. Mr. More is one with Dr. Conybeare in his belief that women should be scholars, as men should, "only, having been neither married, nor having had to minister

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to female invalids, he had more faith in the female understanding" (TWD, p. 292).

Alas, the Antiplatonick part now begins. Cleveland becomes Julian's tutor. He burns the thesis she has written for Henry More on Pythagoras' theory of the soul and sets about to seduce the fifteen-year-old nun of the Platonick quarry who falls blindly in love with him although he cares nothing for her verses and mocks her learning. But Cleveland has immanacled her corporal rind, and Julian learns the sadness that there must always be in love.

Then, on the day of the execution of Strafford, she is killed accidentally in a quarrel between Cleveland and her Puritan brother. She had burned all her verse except the poem she had written that morning, "An Epitaph on the Earl of Strafford," which Rose Macaulay borrows for her from its uncertain attribution to Cleveland:

Riddles lye heere; & in a worde
Heere lyes bloud; & let it lye
Speechless still, & never crye.

(TWD, p. 429)

The Postscript takes place on Midsummer Day 1647, when Herrick seditiously and for the last time reads the Evening Service from the Book of Common Prayer. He is leaving for London. Julian is dead; Dr. Conybeare, despairing of liberty of thought and conscience, has fled to The Hague; Kit lives a hanger-on at the beggared English court in Paris. They are defeated all. Rose Macaulay was justifiably annoyed when the title was changed for American publication. Herrick is left alone to mourn for us "his mutilated Alma Mater in the hands of Vandals, her learned sons exiled and deprived, their places taken by unscholarly usurpers" (TWD, p. 444).

The rose withers, the blossom blasteth,
The flower fades, the morning hasteth,
The sun sets, the shadow flies,
The gourd consumes; and man he dies.

(TWD, p. 426)

Pleasure of Ruins (1953), written at the height of her powers, is one of the three or four best books Rose Macaulay ever wrote. Polymath, slightly perverse in its subject (a heartless pastime she admits it is, echoing Henry James), at times a mighty maze without a plan, it suggests some anatomy from her beloved seventeenth century.¹¹ It is a book hard to read seriatim: so many ruins, so many ruin-fanciers, all described with such style and wit and learning, so many places from China to Peru (only North America escapes, having *keine verfallenen*

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Schlösser), the mind's eye glazes over. But it would be a mistake not to read all of it, in judiciously spaced sittings, because its beauty is cumulative; excerpts can never suggest its rhythm. There is no good reason why it should not have gone on and on with its loving catalog. I, for my part, can wish it longer.

Pleasure of Ruins is both an examination of our pleasure in ruins, its history, and of ruins themselves, their discoverers and visitors. The ruin-seekers are as delightful as the ruins. Caracalla, for example, at the Graeco-Roman Ilium became "Troy-minded to excess," fancied himself Achilles, staged elaborate funeral rites, and ran "naked with his retinue round the hero's tomb" (*PR*, p. 141). Memorable, too, is the triumphal entry of Lady Hester Stanhope on her white Arab horse into Palmyra. "The inhabitants were arranged," she wrote, "in the most picturesque manner on the different columns leading to the Temple of the Sun" (*PR*, p. 75). Dancing girls, poets singing odes, a whole village singing and dancing—we are frankly envious. "One may say that no one has ever enjoyed himself or herself more in any ruins than did Pitt's niece in Palmyra; it was *Ruinenlust* in its highest, most regal degree" (*PR*, p. 76).

Easier for the modern tourist to identify with is C. G. setting out for Baalbek. Having learned a little Arabic to speak to her horse, she packed carefully, "not forgetting my nice little spirit-lamp, with apparatus for making tea, some preserves, sardines, biscuits, hard eggs, etc." Having arrived at the village, she paused: "Now for a cup of delicious tea, some fresh eggs and splendid grapes. A walk of ten minutes, stumbling over huge stones, leaping or wading . . . I stood among the far-famed ruins of the three temples of Baalbek. Well! this is indeed one of the wonders of the world" (*PR*, pp. 82–83).

Turks she dislikes and Goths, "those disgusting savages who roamed over Europe sacking other people's cities, who are so praised by German historians, and who ought never to have left the Vistula" (*PR*, p. 169). Her heroes, on the other hand, are many: the romantic Gregorovius, that "learned, picturesque and ivy-loving historian of the Middle Ages" (*PR*, p. 301), Baedeker, Cassiodorus, Pope Pius II. Hadrian is her man: "But most he liked to see things: it was his ruling passion . . . and famous ruins, such as Ilium, Thebes, and Nauplia sent him into ecstasies" (*PR*, p. 401). She greatly admires archaeologists like Sir A. H. Layard and Sir Arthur Evans, who taste "the highest and purest of ruin-pleasures" (*PR*, p. xvi), but appreciates as well the varied sensibilities of Chateaubriand and Byron and Hobhouse.

Throughout history she selects those who share her ruin-pleasures.

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The first of these would seem to be the Hebrew prophets, "in those impassioned invectives described meiotically by commentators as 'discourses against foreign nations' " (*PR*, p. 1). Pilgrims to Nineveh can quote Zephaniah

who, like all prophets, rejoiced over the ruin of great cities, confident that they had richly deserved their fate, for prophets have believed all large cities to be given over to wickedness, and an abomination in the eyes of the Lord, and no doubt they are right. They have been the most single-minded of ruin-lovers, having no use for cities until they fall, and then rejoicing over the shattered remains in ringing words.

"And he will stretch out his hand against the south and destroy Assyria and will make Nineveh a desolation . . . everyone that passeth by her shall hiss and wag his hand."

It may be questioned if Zephaniah would have approved the excavations which have brought the wicked palaces to light, to be marveled at by future generations who neither hiss nor wag their hands, but carefully steal decorations and graven images and store them in museums for the admiration of the world. (*PR*, p. 99)

Though, as for Nineveh, Rose Macaulay is not greatly enthusiastic, rightly calling winged bulls "those creatures so little loveable to any but Assyrians" (*PR*, p. 98).

The ruins themselves and the so varied pleasures they excite are, of course, her central concern. Unable or perhaps only unwilling to organize them at all neatly (only churches and castles stay put very well), the reader moves back and forth through Greece and Italy, Syria, Turkey, the Barbary Coast, Mesopotamia, Armenia, and India, with excursions to Central and South America and the Far East. On Mycenae she is both reverent and funny:

Today, like Pausanias, we observe the Lion Gate . . . admire the fragments of the Cyclopean walls, the Treasury of Atreus, the tombs, the remains of palace and temple, and muse on the terrible family life led by the royal house of Pelops, as Edmond About mused at the Lion Gate on a Sunday morning a century ago, with the shocked pleasure of one reading the more sensational Sunday papers. . . . Indeed, to reflect on the extraordinary goings-on that occurred when the ruins we survey were in their hey-day must ever be among the pleasures that move us, and such reflections have profoundly moved those who have gazed on ruined cities, castles, palaces and abbeys. (*PR*, p. 107)

On Pompeii she is admirable, on the Neapolitan villas and palaces,

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on the history of Athens' ruins, on Rome, whose ruining affects her as it did Gibbon. How one envies Hildebert of Lavardin and Petrarch for what they were still able to see, and Byron, Shelley, Chateaubriand, Stendhal for the luxuriant conditions in which they could see what was left, half-buried beneath trees and vines, moss and wild flowers, while now every ruin is scrubbed and cleaned. Inevitably, twin laments run through the book, that ruins themselves become more ruined, and that no one can reconcile the opposed demands of the Romantic tourist and the archaeologist. One mourns Gauthier's Stamboul, the Carthage Tasso and Chateaubriand saw, the Pozzuoli of Evelyn and Bishop Burnett—all spoiled by urban development. How little is left of Osney, beloved by Aubrey, lying in the slums near Oxford's (rebuilt) railway station, while Tintern and Netley have been cleaned up by the Ministry of Works.

She prefers her classical temples broken but not entirely prone, finds Byzantine churches more exquisite when entire but decayed, and Baroque in ruins the most emotion-stirring of all. The decaying churches of Armenia strike the right note, especially the Byzantine with their conical tiled roofs and apses and broken Roman columns. "About them mutter the eccentric ghosts of the so tenacious, so wrong-headed anti-Chalcedon churchmen who maintained their monophysite rites and notions in them for so long. . . . There is something reassuring in their ancientness, their sturdy frailty, and their spirited, erroneous, martyred history" (*PR*, p. 394).

She brings to her vast survey a remarkably wide range of response; she is the least narrow-minded of tourists, rejoicing at once in classical architecture, in Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic, Baroque, in pagan palaces and crusaders' castles and Indian rock temples. Everywhere the reader feels her passionate fondness for the past and delight in its ruined artifacts. Especially does her abiding interest in the history of Christianity come through, her love of its extreme beauty and oddity. There is, she tells us, a baptistery in Djemila,

on whose font an inscription remarks hopefully that in time all nations will be baptised. Be that as it may, the valiant attempts to bring such a state of affairs about has strewn the habitable and uninhabitable world with the most enchanting buildings in decay. The Jesuit order in particular, diving into fantastic jungles to baptise the most improbable beings, planted their baroque mission churches in clearings among dense forests and cannibal Americans whom they instructed in the faith against startling odds. . . . To come suddenly out of savage forests into such a clearing, to see such a church embraced by the wild growths of

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the centuries since its desertion, but still civil, still elegantly baroque in its ruin, would be an encounter of the most rewarding.

One thinks of Charles Ryder in *Brideshead Revisited*.

What a traveling companion Rose Macaulay would have been, greeting each ruin with enthusiasm, knowing everything earlier visitors had written, investigating with intelligence each new dig, revisiting ruins loved since childhood, swimming wherever possible, as, for example, among the ruins of Roman villas near Naples.

The Towers of Trebizond (1956) has one of the three or four best opening sentences I know: "Take my camel, dear," said my aunt Dot, as she climbed down from this animal on her return from High Mass."¹² It is her funniest and wisest book. She was nearly eighty, with a lifetime of writing behind her, when she achieved her masterpiece.

One can think of several things that help explain the book's distinction. Her novel has a double focus, one comic, one tragic. It is full of the most amusing incidents and dialogue and is at the same time an exploration of a conscience struggling with sin and faith. She has expanded the genre of the comic novel.

She achieves this by using a first-person narration which unifies her novel and by creating for her narrator, Laurie, a prose style which is a great comic invention, a triumph of parataxis, rambling, stuck full of surprising odds and ends of feelings and beliefs, that ranges easily from the profane to the sacred. It is Laurie's prose which allows Rose Macaulay to write a novel rich in eccentric characters and a kind of disciplined lunacy, which is also an investigation of the gravest problems of belief, a serious call to a sober and devout life. Laurie shuttles between describing the funny things that keep happening and recording her own consciousness. Her imagination lights up the books with metaphors at once odd and beautiful that fit the wittily careless prose:

Dr. Pococke had said that, when he was there, Troas was infested by Rogues; that was over two centuries ago, but Rogues do go on in the same places for ever, as churches do, it seems to have something to do with the soil they are on. A group of inhabitants stood by the road as we drove up; they were dark and sad, and they may have been rogues, but I thought they looked more like those obscure, dejected, maladjusted and calamity-prone characters who come into Tenebrae, such as Aleph, Teth, Beth, Caleph, Jod, Ghimel, Mem and the rest, and they sounded as if they were talking in that afflicted strain that those characters talk in, and saying things like "he has brought me into darkness and not into

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light," "he has compassed me with gall and labour," "he has built against me round about, that I may not get out, he has upset my paths," and "my eyes have failed with weeping, my bowels are disturbed, my liver is poured out," and so on, till all the lights go out and there is nothing but the dark. (*TT*, p. 40)

We have been led in two sentences from Turkish vagrants through the ceremonies of *Tenebrae* and the Lamentations of Jeremiah to the death of God.

She also hit on the idea of using the form of a travel book. She had always written splendidly about places and history; now she can do it through her pleasing narrator. The choice of Turkey (which she had recently visited) makes possible the double focus. The setting is rich in comic possibilities; the wrecked Byzantine splendor creates the images that carry the religious theme.

Even the stylishness of the prose serves a purpose; it reveals Laurie to us. Never has Macaulay used better her trick of suddenly embedding a quotation, because here the mannerism illuminates Laurie's mind; we learn the kinds of things her memory is stored with: "Some of them [Laurie's clerical ancestors] were thus vanquished by the assaults of Manicheism, others by the innocent theories of Pelagius, others again by that kind of pantheism which is apt to occur in meadows and woods, others by the difficulties of thus thinking of the Trinity, and still more by plain Doubt" (*TT*, p. 13).

The plot, with its comic and tragic elements, is easily told. Laurie goes to Turkey with her aunt Dot and the Hon. the Rev. Hugh Chantrey-Pigg, who are being sent by the Anglo-Catholic Missionary Society to see if the neighborhood of Trebizond would be a suitable place to open an Anglican mission. The amazing and fearless aunt Dot, a staunch Anglican who, however, sits down during the Athanasian Creed, is "a cheerful and romantic adventurer" (*TT*, p. 16) for whom travel is the chief end of life. Father Chantrey-Pigg, an ancient bigot, had a London church several inches higher than St. Magnus Martyr, is now retired, and collects relics; in Tiflu he cures a policeman's wife of lumbago with a relic of St. Jane Frances De Chantal applied on her feast day. When aunt Dot and Father Hugh disappear quietly behind the Iron Curtain to fish in the Caspian and see Armenian churches, Laurie returns alone to Trebizond and then travels, drugged by an enchanter's potion, by camel from Trebizond to Jerusalem, meeting at Alexandretta her married lover, Vere. Back in England, she anxiously awaits news of aunt Dot who does, of course, turn up. Laurie goes off for a holiday in

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Venice with Vere, and as they drive back from Folkestone, he is killed when a bus crashes into their car.

It is, then, in part, and this provides the comedy, a Turkey book, such as so many of their friends are engaged simultaneously in writing, full of adventure and tourism. She invents marvelous complications with passports and the Turkish language, scattering acerbic comments on Moslemism, policemen, and Turks.

They take with them aunt Dot's camel, and not a Landrover, and this has many advantages, service garages being few. But, on the other hand, the camel, the book's most foolish character, causes much inconvenience, being mental.

"Has it had mental trouble before? For I think that it now has."

Aunt Dot said that she believed that camels usually had a certain degree of this, they were born with it, and without it they would never lead the peculiar lives they did, but her camel had, she thought, not yet been actually round the bend. (*TT*, p. 114)

"It looks odd because it is odd," Said Aunt Dot. "Camels are." (*TT*, p. 115)

Laurie, as accomplished a traveler as aunt Dot, well-up on Byzantine history and architecture and the history of the Greek Church, is, as her prose proves, a complex young woman. The tragic element in the book is her adultery, whose sinfulness she never disguises or denies. She cannot, she thinks, give up her married lover, Vere. The sin comes from a deep meanness and selfishness, but out of these, and this is her problem, flow love and joy and peace. Father Chantrey-Pigg asks her on Whit Sunday how much longer she will go shutting the door against God. Will she come back only when she has nothing to offer but a burnt-out fire? "'Oh, he'll take it, he'll take anything we offer. It is you who will be impoverished for ever by so poor a gift.'" Has she put herself beyond caring, he asks. "Not quite, never quite, I had tried, but never quite. From time to time I knew what I had lost" (*TT*, pp. 71-72). And she thinks of Trebizond, "that lost corner of a lost empire, defeated and gone under so long ago that now she scarcely knew or remembered lost Byzantium, having grown unworthy of it, blind, deaf and not caring any more, not even believing, and perhaps that was the ultimate hell" (*TT*, p. 73).

Slowly Laurie's imagination transforms the dull Trabzon of today into the symbol of her baffled religious longings. Trabzon keeps dissolving into Trebizond, and Trebizond acquires an anagogic level

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and becomes the City of God. Through metaphor and symbol Rose Macaulay can develop her Christian theme within Laurie's capacious prose, without violating the novel's surface.

The real Trebizond is, she knows, "in the ruined Byzantine citadel, keep and palace on the heights . . . and in the disused, wrecked Byzantine churches that brooded, forlorn, lovely, ravished and apostate ghosts, about the hills and shores of that lost empire" (*TT*, p. 80). Hidden there is something she wants for herself and could make her own. She has between sleeping and waking, in the central passage of the novel,

a vision of Trebizond: not Trebizond as I had seen it, but the Trebizond of the world's dreams, of my own dreams, shining towers and domes shimmering on a far horizon, yet close at hand, luminously enspelled in the most fantastic unreality, yet the only reality, a walled and gated city, magic and mystical, standing beyond my reach yet I had to be inside, an alien wanderer yet at home, held in the magical enchantment; and at its heart, at the secret heart of the city and the legend and the glory in which I was caught and held, there was some pattern I could not unravel, some hard core that I could not make my own, and, seeing the pattern and the hard core enshrined within the walls, I turned back from the city and stood outside it, expelled in mortal grief. (*TT*, pp. 209-10)

She cannot enter the Kingdom because she will not. But her Augustinian restlessness persists, and her vision of the Church:

the gleaming, infrangible, so improbable as to be all but impossible, walled kingdom of the infrangible God. . . . The fact that at present I cannot find my way into it does not lessen, but rather heightens its spell; a magic castle, it changes down the ages its protean form, but on its battlements the *splendor lucis aeternae* inextinguishably down all the ages lies. (*TT*, p. 244)

Nor does Vere's death allow Laurie to return to the Church. "I live now in two hells, for I have lost God and live also without love, or without the love I want, and I cannot get used to that either. Though people say that in the end one does. To the other, perhaps, never" (*TT*, p. 287).

The Towers of Trebizond is thus about faith because it is about the loss of faith. The end is left very much open. We are permitted to hope that Laurie, with her great sense of humor and her high romantic dreams, will, ultimately, enter Trebizond, her fortress and her ease.

What else of Rose Macaulay is most worth reading? Of the nonfiction, it would be a pity to miss *Fabled Shore*,¹³ a first-rate travel

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book on Spain which, most unfortunately, helped begin the destruction of the Costa Brava. Following the route of Avienus' late-fourth-century *Ora Maritima* she drove in 1947 along the eastern and southern seaboard. It took a sense of adventure to do this alone at the age of sixty-six, and although she was never stoned, as nineteenth-century travelers were apt to be, some little boys did throw tomatoes at her once, and everywhere she was greeted with the cry, "una señora que conduce!" Many of the roads were, as Gauthier had found them, "vraiment impraticables," and when the hotels promised by out-of-date guidebooks could not be found, she simply camped out under the stars, alone.

Her letters to Father Johnson, *Letters to a Friend*, and its sequel,¹⁴ were received with enthusiasm and are indispensable for our knowledge of her. However right Elizabeth Taylor and Robert Liddell may have been in deploring the violation of privacy in publishing them after her death,¹⁵ it is impossible to regret the publication of books that so many have found comforting and inspiring.

Among the many novels it is possible to list only a few titles. The five early novels one may ignore; she was believed to be planning to steal the copies in the London Library. *The Making of a Bigot* (1914) is the first novel in which she found her mature voice, and although *Potterism* (1920) and *Dangerous Ages* (1921) have most amusing passages and helped establish her reputation, *Told by an Idiot* (1924) is, I think, her first totally assured novel.¹⁶ It begins in 1879 and ends in 1923 and while we follow the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Garden and their six children, and grandchildren, we watch the shift from Late Victorianism to the Twenties, the political situation, the new books, the appearance of bicycles, bloomers, Ping-Pong, nightclubs. Mr. Garden, modeled on Thomas Arnold, is one of her most lovable characters. In the course of the novel he becomes an Ethicist, a Roman Catholic once again, a Theosophist, a Christian Scientist, an Evangelical, a Spiritualist, a disciple of the Higher Thought, and of the New Theology, and at the novel's end he embraces all creeds, believing everything. His granddaughter Imogen dreams of becoming a poet and knows all the ships in the British Navy. At fourteen "she still, and, for many years to come, thought of herself, with hope growing faint and ever fainter, as a brown-skinned, blue-eyed young naval man."¹⁷ Rose Macaulay's father finally had to tell her when she was about thirteen that she really must stop saying she wanted to be a young man and go into the Navy.¹⁸

Orphan Island (1924)¹⁹ was, she told Father Johnson, except for *They Were Defeated*, the novel she most enjoyed writing.²⁰ It is both a

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celebration and a mocking of the myth of the desert island. The Thinkwells, arriving from Cambridge to rescue any survivors of the orphans their grandfather had abandoned on a coral reef sixty-five years before, discover that the orphans under the direction of their guardian, Miss Smith, have reproduced the social, ecclesiastical, and economic arrangements of Victorian Britain. Miss Smith's identification with Queen Victoria is now absolute as she reigns at Balmoral, her cottage among the palm groves. The contrasts between the island splendor and the rigid caste system are wonderful to follow. Primitivist dreams are confounded by what a Miss Smith can do to an island paradise. But not entirely. The island remains memorably beautiful and seductive.

Elizabeth Bowen finely calls *Staying with Relations* (1930) Rose Macaulay's "most dementing novel."²¹ It also contains one of her finest inventions, a hacienda set in the clearing of a Guatemalan jungle that had been a Dominican monastery built on Mayan ruins and whose great bedroom is after one of the New Palace rooms at Potsdam while the dining room is Cuvilliés' octagon room in the Amalienburg. Here Catherine Grey comes to visit her relatives, "like so many young females, a novelist" (SR, p. 9) who has been lecturing in the United States on the Creation of Character in Fiction. The first night she firmly characterizes each of her relatives only to discover, as the action of the novel proves, that she has been entirely wrong. Still, she argues, "people must be like something, if only one can discover what" (SR, p. 224).

The World, My Wilderness (1950)²² is, though untypical, certainly one of her two or three best novels. Two children who have lived in France during the war, on the fringes of the Maquis, are brought to England to live with their upper-middle-class families, and for escape and solace they play among the ruined churches near St. Paul's. It was her first novel since the war and the bombing of her flat, the first since the death of Gerald O'Donovan, and it is a somber and moving book. "The maquis is within us," says Helen, "we take our wilderness where we go" (WMW, p. 210). Her son, like Flaubert, "is aware of irremediable barbarism coming up out of the earth, and of filth flung against the ivory tower" and quotes Burke: "Learning will be cast into the mire and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude" (WMW, p. 25). And yet the ruined churches, St. Alban's and St. Giles's and St. Vedast's, "kept their strange courses, kept their improbable, incommunicable secret" (WMW, p. 150) and still stand amid the Waste Land.

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¹ Hilary Spurling, *Ivy: The Life of I. Compton-Burnett* (New York: Knopf, 1984), between p. 430 and p. 431.

² Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt, 1972); Robert Liddell, *Elizabeth and Ivy* (London: Peter Owen, 1986); Constance Babington Smith, *Rose Macaulay* (Collins, 1972).

³ Babington Smith, *Rose Macaulay*, p. 129.

⁴ The place of publication for all Rose Macaulay's books is London.

⁵ Babington Smith, *Rose Macaulay*, p. 219.

⁶ *The Towers of Trebizond* (Collins, 1956), p. 287.

⁷ Liddell, *Elizabeth and Ivy*, p. 70.

⁸ *Going Abroad* (Collins, 1934), pp. 1–2. All further references to this work will be given parenthetically by page numbers in the text, cited as GA.

⁹ *They Were Defeated* (1932; rpt. Collins, 1966), p. 42. All further references to this work will be given parenthetically by page numbers in the text, cited as TWD.

¹⁰ *Letters to a Friend from Rose Macaulay, 1950–52*, ed. Constance Babington Smith (Collins, 1961), p. 300.

¹¹ *Pleasure of Ruins* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), p. xvii. All further references to this work will be given parenthetically by page numbers in the text, cited as PR. The reader's pleasure will be increased by consulting the splendid illustrations of the text offered in *Roloff Beny Interprets in Photographs "Pleasure of Ruins" by Rose Macaulay* (Thames and Hudson, 1964; rev. ed. 1977).

¹² *The Towers of Trebizond* (Collins, 1956), p. 9. All further references to this work will be given parenthetically in the text, cited as TT.

¹³ *Fabled Shore: From the Pyrenees to Portugal* (Hamish Hamilton, 1949).

¹⁴ *Letters to a Friend from Rose Macaulay, 1950–52*, ed. Babington Smith; *Last Letters to a Friend, 1952–1958*, ed. Babington Smith (Collins, 1962).

¹⁵ Liddell, *Elizabeth and Ivy*, p. 33.

¹⁶ *The Making of a Bigot* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1914); *Potterism* (Collins, 1920); *Dangerous Ages* (Collins, 1921); *Told by an Idiot* (Collins, 1923).

¹⁷ *Told by an Idiot*, pp. 224–25.

¹⁸ Babington Smith, ed., *Letters to a Friend*, p. 14.

¹⁹ *Orphan Island* (Collins, 1924).

²⁰ Babington Smith, ed., *Letters to a Friend*, p. 59.

²¹ Elizabeth Bowen, Introduction to *Staying with Relations* (1930; rpt. Collins, 1969), p. 1. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as SR.

²² *The World, My Wilderness* (Collins, 1950). Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as WMW.

Margaret Drabble: An Interview

Hampstead, London
June 20 and 25, 1985

JOHN HANNAY

This interview with Margaret Drabble came at a time when she had just finished editing the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* (1985) and was in the middle of composing her most recent novel, *The Radiant Way* (1987). In comments on journalism, architecture, feminism, motherhood, foreign affairs, and class issues, she reflects the focus of that novel and of her recent articles on the social conditions in England, especially the contrast between Northern England (where she was raised) and London (where she now lives). She also discusses some of her earlier novels—particularly *The Waterfall* (1969), *The Needle's Eye* (1972), *The Realms of Gold* (1975), *The Ice Age* (1977), and *The Middle Ground* (1980)—and talks at length about what many critics consider to be her central theme, fate, in relation to literary conventions.

John Hannay: Have you ever taught writing?

Margaret Drabble: No.

JH: Would you like to?

MD: No. In a way, for me, the point of teaching was to make myself read another book or another poet, or another something. Whereas teaching writing seems to me more like group therapy. I'm very bad at saying to people, "Your poem is dreadful." I get very shy when it comes to talking about people's own work directly. I'm terribly polite and agree with everything they say, which is not what's necessary. I'm not good at it. Whereas I am good at taking a text by someone else

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and forcing people to look at what it really says, rather than what they thought it said. I'm quite good at that because it's not a direct personal confrontation; it's a kind of round-about one. But I'm no good at saying to somebody, "You need to do this and that in your novel." I also can't usually see what it is that they could do.

JH: American academia does a lot with writing courses. But British universities don't do as much, do they?

MD: Very little, yes. But I'm not saying that I approve of my own attitude. I think that most English writers would say that teaching creative writing is not a good pursuit. I don't take that view; I think that it can be taught well. In the University of East Anglia, there's a creative writing course which has produced some of our most successful young writers: Ian McEwan, Rose Tremain. Several young writers, who've been very successful, learned creative writing there. Because it had a very good reputation, it had very good people: Angus Wilson and Malcolm Bradbury. It had a very good feel about it, and obviously produced some good work. So I think it can happen. But I think that it could be just that I want to keep that part of myself slightly separate from teaching. I suppose it has something to do with my own personality defects.

JH: The English don't tend to write very much about living writers, do they? Do you think that is a good policy, or a bad policy?

MD: I just don't know. There are moments when I think it's a very sound policy, that the attention that's paid to living work is clogging it slightly, stopping it from moving on freely. People are being asked what they are doing all the time, so they worry about how to answer that instead of getting on with the next thing. Writing isn't about writing; it's about the other thing, which is called life. The problem with someone with a background like mine is that I'm overloaded, not underloaded, with literary allusions. And in order to communicate with people who are not thus weighted down, I have to try to conceal and forget things, or make sure that they are coming from very deep, rather than all over the top of the text.

JH: When *would* you use a literary analogy?

MD: When it is so well known that it has a reverberation to everybody: there is a common ground of allusiveness, and it's part of one's common heritage, like the Bible. It's so well known that it is not saying to somebody, "Aha! We're all Ph.D.s." It's saying, you know Shakespeare, you know King Lear and his daughters, you know



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Margaret Drabble

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Charlotte Brontë and what happened to her. That is a sort of broad area of knowledge. I think it's perfectly fair to have levels of textuality in which some jokes, one or two, are meant for literary scholars. I think you would be interested in this: in *The Middle Ground*, I had a great deal of trouble resolving the plot, or lack of plot. I had a great deal of difficulty with that book. And when I decided to have a party at the end, that seemed fine because it was an emblem of social life, and everybody gets together.

JH: But then?

MD: Then suddenly you have a bit of *Mrs. Dalloway*, and in a way I thought that was slightly weakening. But I thought, "Ah! That's wonderful!"

JH: But if you didn't put an allusion there, then you ran the risk of everybody saying that you were unconsciously borrowing?

MD: Exactly. And in fact, I thought of it afterwards. I had the party first; in fact the party idea really came from a friend of mine, Peter Vansittart, who has always argued in his novels, "when things get stuck, have a party." That's where people meet. That's what they are for, so that people should come across one another. The literary connection, *Mrs. Dalloway*, is both weakening and fortifying. It made me realize that I couldn't resolve this book. I could only resolve it in terms of a "half-resolution." I suppose I thought at that stage that the novel was more derivative than I had thought it was being and that it was more literary than I had intended it to be. I don't know quite what I think, but at the time I felt quite pleased. I've subsequently felt an element of uneasiness. Whereas with the end of *The Ice Age*, which is a very curious ending, that passage where they all go to Eastern Europe, the references to Le Carré are a joke. It was saying, "A lot of people read Le Carré, and now poor old Anthony is going to have to as well." It was a joke, really, but it wasn't integral to the fact that he was there. He wasn't there because he'd read Le Carré. But he was there because he'd read an awful lot of stories about being a British gentleman when he was a little boy. But that's different. I think Anthony Keating, or myself, or any of us, are what we are partly because of what we read when we were little. I accept that completely.

I deeply believe that that kind of influence and recollection and triggering of memory is very important indeed. I think that if one is brought up reading Puritan literature, one either has to live with it or dismiss it. I mean, you can't be uninfluenced by it; as with the Bunyan, you can't be uninfluenced by it. But I also feel that what some writers

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tend to do is to get a bit too glib and smart about the level of influence, and that they tend to invoke a pattern in somebody else's book intellectually without it having been felt through the character and through the way a person's life has been changed, so that you get too much of the intellectual level of correspondence and not enough of the growth from below. The real material is not literary—it's extra-literary; it's outside in the real world. And although literary patterns can help to make sense of it, it's got to be your pattern, not somebody else's pattern from the past.

JH: *The Middle Ground* is about a journalist, and it has some of the earmarks of a journalist's style. Kate Armstrong, the main character, is worked up as a case study in the beginning. You bring in interviews and facts about the life of marginal people that a sociologist might be interested in. You've also been recently writing a lot of articles about England, for example the article that appeared in the *New York Times* on Sheffield. Will that area of interest and the journalist style play a part in your next novel?

MD: Yes, I'm very interested in the documentary novel, in what's happening, the variety of things happening, our partial apprehension of things. It's very difficult to find a form, and I didn't feel like I'd succeeded in *The Middle Ground* at finding a form to represent the simultaneity of goings on. I think that's slightly what I'm struggling with at the moment, trying to portray contemporary Britain—social attitudes, the way people behave, the way they dress or think—through a variety of viewpoints. The last thing it is is recollected in tranquility—it is not that at all. I suppose there's a difference between journalism and the longer perspective of fiction. I'm not really interested in the longer perspective at the moment; I'm interested in just working out what's happening now.

JH: In your landscape book and your novels where you talk about renovation projects, you seem not to approve of some of the attempts at renovation and restoration, yet you seem to be saying that, well, something has to be done. How does one live in the present, yet connect one's self to what was good in the past? What has happened to the British sense of place?

MD: Well I think it's pretty desperate in England, really, for the simple demographic reason that there are too many people to preserve the kind of beauties that we think of as being typically English. The architects have no idea what to do. We've just had a row about building a new tower in the city—tremendous pressure groups fighting on both

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sides and statutes involved—; it's very much an "*Ice Age*" situation. You have on one side the conservationists, with tremendously good names and high moral standards, trying to preserve a very second-rate lot of buildings. On the other hand, you have this entrepreneur architect who has got this fine building, but by the time he's fought to get it up—and in fact he failed—it's already ten years out of date, and it's no longer at the front line of technology. That's so British. I suppose I see it really as a comedy—a kind of terrible comedy because I can't see what the answer is. I've talked to people on both sides of that particular debate. I sometimes think, as I go around, that the English are so timid that when they build a modern building, they make it small and hide it as if embarrassed; then I think it's not appropriate to build these things in London because the scale is wrong. I think London isn't too bad at all.

But if you go to some of the northern cities, their rebuilding is dreadful—just sort of anonymous, profiteering shopping malls. All that stuff in *The Ice Age* about shopping centers—they're all over; the man who built them was based up north. He's built them in Manchester and Sheffield—no, not in Sheffield, oddly enough—Bradford, all over. There's one in London now. Architecturally, they are dreadful. They're most unattractive from outside—they have these slit windows—and they're fairly dreadful inside. But they're quite popular, and the man who built them is genuinely very proud of them. He thinks they're wonderful, and I find it interesting that he continues to feel immensely proud of these really rather dreadful places. Whereas in Sheffield, there's this marvelous community housing project which went up in the 1950s and looks spectacular, very adventurous architecture, but now everyone complains about it; just doesn't work. So it depends which one prefers—the thing that is visually stunning and doesn't work or the thing that looks absolutely appalling and people flock to it very happily with their perambulators. I find it interesting. I don't have any moral attitude to it. I suppose I, like everyone, feel sad when something that I've particularly liked disappears. But I also am very perplexed by the idea that I quite often like something simply because no one else is there, and it's secret, private, beautiful because it's unknown. How can one justify feeling like that when everyone else has got to live in ugly places and high density?

JH: Do you think that England needs to be made more aware of its relation to the Third World today?

MD: Well, England is such a diverse body. There are a lot of people who are very aware of the Third World. They're aware of our

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responsibilities for some of the things that have gone wrong in the Third World. And there's a lot of interest in India and Africa, possibly more so than in America: a very real connection with what's happening in Zimbabwe and Uganda. We support these regimes; we've been very deeply involved politically in Africa. So I think a lot of people do feel guilt, undoubtedly, and a desire to make restitution. Other people think that it has nothing to do with them at all. I suppose I'm on the guilty side. I was brought up very much to believe that we were very much responsible for our past part in colonial disasters. I think a whole section of the British community is brought up in that tradition.

JH: But you mocked that in *The Millstone*, where Rosamund's parents go off and seem excessively preoccupied with their own guilt, as a way of avoiding their own present.

MD: Yes. But in a way I rather admire Rosamund's parents. She doesn't come out of it too badly. She does all right. She thinks she's been neglected, and in a sense I suppose she has. But possibly not. We never meet her parents, but they undoubtedly would have had a story to tell: why they did what they did. And as Rosamund herself said at some point, she does believe in the values that they have taught to her. I've just written about it in my new novel. I find this British Left-wing, Fabian concern very, very interesting. I was brought up partly on that, and partly not. I've just written a passage in which I'm trying to describe how a lot of the attention of, for instance, the Quakers and other Christian organizations was directed very much towards the Third World—aid projects and voluntary services—and very little to anything that was happening in England. That's because it was safer to look abroad. Young people, eighteen and nineteen, would go abroad and work a couple of years and feel tremendously virtuous and come back. Whereas it was dynamite if you tried to go and work in England. I suppose I am interested in the shock that we in the West have whenever we step over a border, and I feel that it is perhaps the novelist's responsibility not to ignore totally that there is a world outside that we fit in.

JH: You have done a lot of traveling for the British Council, haven't you?

MD: I've done most of the European countries and some Iron Curtain countries as well, as part of lecture tours organized by the British Council. It's a way to meet other writers. I can give a lecture on the British novel, but at the same time, in the evening, I can go to a meeting on the Indian novel, or meet Indian novelists or Belgian

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novelists, or whatever. So I learn a lot from them, and I hope they learn something from me. But my personal interest in going is to find out what they're doing. And that suits everybody, I hope. I'd never have been to Poland in the circumstances that I went if I hadn't been invited by the British Council. It was very exciting. And sometimes one makes very good friends. I made a very good friend in Poland, Jerzy Limon, a young don at the University of Gdansk who writes wonderful English. He wrote a highly specialized study of English drama, *Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660*. He also writes novels in Polish, which of course I can't read. But his English stuff I can read. So that's very nice to find somebody whom one can get on with very well in a completely different world, who will tell you about Polish politics and give you a sense of what life's like for a writer out there. The more you travel, the more sense you have of the complexity of the world, and some of what you see is real. It isn't all propaganda. And that's why I think it's worth going: because you see something.

JH: And though you're always questioning what you've seen, how general and true it is, still at least you've seen it, more than if you just see it on the media, which are more selective, more distorting.

MD: I think that—more selective than your own eye. If you've actually tried to catch a train in the Calcutta railway station, you know that all these stories that it's so wonderful to travel by train in India must have been written by somebody forty years ago. It is unbelievably dreadful, the Calcutta railway station. It is indescribable. It is like a vision of hell. It is horrendous. I don't think any film could ever show the kind of human density and squalor and anxiety and dirt and crowding that you see as you're trying to get on the train. I suppose I'm glad to have seen that. It's something, in a way, that you have to see for yourself. I kept trying to work out whether our Indian hosts, some of whom were very Anglicized people, saw it through my eyes, or whether they had learned to ignore it. I suppose they have, some of them, learned to ignore it. But I think they're very sensitive to how it appears to someone for the first time.

JH: Do you feel that you have more to say on the issue of feminism when speaking in the context of India or Turkey than in Britain, where you might feel what you have to say is less distinctive or has less need to be said?

MD: Yes. That's absolutely true. Turkey is very interesting because they have equality; they banned the veil, yet there's a certain kind of reactionary attitude in a lot of the outlying districts. But there are also a

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lot of very progressive women, so you get a good mixture of attitudes there. And of course the progressive women are very pleased to find somebody who will come in and make it all sound as though it is obvious and natural.

JH: Critics of your attitude toward feminism often cite the ending of *The Ice Age* and your characterization of Alison Murray's fate as unimaginable. Why couldn't you imagine her fate? You've told Anthony's story, which might be thought of as more opaque than Alison's.

MD: I'm just amazed when I look at this now to see that it's all under the historic present. It's because we're now up to date. I'd forgotten I'd done that. I seem to be using, everybody seems to be using a lot of historic present at the moment, don't they? All of Alison Lurie's books have been in the historic present. Now, I think the reason I did that was to imply that there wasn't really much of a prospect for her; that it was going to be dreadful, and I didn't feel like depressing everybody by getting into it; that in a way it was better to have a kind of terrible drama in your life than to have a day-to-day grief. And I suppose it is something to do with plot: it's saying that writing about somebody in a prison is exciting and conventional and plot-like. You've read about how he got there, and what he's doing there, and it's all quite dramatic. Whereas Alison's life isn't dramatic at all, and people really don't want to know about people with handicapped children very much. They don't want to read novels about how this day is the same as the next day, and the next day is the same, and it gets harder, and as the child gets older, the problems get worse rather than better, and so on. I think I was trying to say that her story wasn't a very good plot. By saying that, I was saying that it's not the kind of thing that you can write about; you can just pay a kind of tribute to it, by saying that it's hard.

JH: I thought it was more apocalyptic—that there was something very black and symbolic about her life that you wanted to enlarge—and I thought it was an awfully quick way to bring in the final Day of Judgment.

MD: No, no. I think it's more that it just goes on and on and on, and she gets older, and Molly gets sicker. It's not very clear, but I mean you can tell that from the slightly downbeat feel of the way it's said, which hasn't got any grandeur to it.

JH: At one point, you have Anthony think about Molly's cerebral

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palsy, "What was it for? Was it a joke? A trial? A punishment?" Which would you say it was?

MD: The only respectable thing it could be is a trial.

JH: That's the Job metaphor, the idea that our tribulations are justified in the sense that they test our faith?

MD: The only possible way of making sense of that kind of tragedy is that it tries you. Occasionally I've seen people come out very well after that kind of thing, but they are the people who believe that they can. I think to believe that it is a punishment is terrible, and to believe it's a joke . . . I suppose to believe it's a bad joke is one honorable way of looking at disaster. But to see it as a trial is to me the most positive way.

JH: Kitty Friedman banishes thoughts about her tragedy. Now that would be an evasion of a trial, yet she, in some ways, comes out pretty well.

MD: She does. She's got this amazing capacity for ignoring evil. She was based on my first mother-in-law, who is the most amazing woman. She just won't have it that there's anything wrong. And the result of that is there isn't anything wrong. She gives out a good deal of goodness because she refuses to see anything else at all. Of course it's infuriating at times, but most of the time it seems to be a highly successful way of being pleasant. It is a very interesting case. I never know quite what she thinks. She's very deaf, has been ever since she was young; she's very much a case of hear-no-evil.

JH: It's a hard message, isn't it, the idea of a trial, because it has so little in the way of proof that suffering has a purpose, that it will make you a better character. It doesn't make Alison a better character.

MD: No, of course; no one can answer this question, and that's why we put it in novels—because we can't answer it, and it's interesting to speculate on how one would answer it. I suppose I believe . . . no I don't believe anything. I think it could be said to be arbitrary, therefore a joke. Though of the people I know that have had terrible things visited on their children, some have gone mad, and some have behaved wonderfully. I do know at least one family that has become wonderful as a result of one child being ill. They are the most kind, cheerful people. I mean, God should be ashamed of himself for having inflicted it on them. It could be that they were just like that; they'd have been radiantly happy anyway, but as it is they just had to work a bit harder. I don't know, but I think one of the reasons one writes novels is to brood

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over these conundrums that the world sets up, for which we don't have an answer.

JH: Don't you say in your novels that a lot of things are sheer accident?

MD: Yes, I do, but I also think that it's very unlike us to believe that. It's very unlike human beings to believe that things are accidents; they are constantly looking for reasons, aren't they? It's one of the conditions of being human that one is always looking for a cause. And if one can't find a cause in oneself, then one looks for an agent behind that.

JH: Do you find yourself doing that?

MD: Yes, I do. I don't take myself seriously when I'm doing it, any more than I take it very seriously when I look at the number on my bus ticket to see if it's a lucky one, which I still do. I don't think I'm going to have a wonderful day if I get double seven, double seven, but because I've looked all my life, I continue to look. And with the Freudian interpretation of accident, one can make almost anything purposeful. Like when one breaks one's particularly favorite little dish. One then says, "Oh dear, is it because I forgot to ring my mother?" Thus creating a false sequence possibly. Or possibly not.

JH: At least having a story to tell about it. One thing that keeps coming up in our conversation is this tremendous need to fill life with stories.

MD: Well, the story of one's own life is obscure enough, in that if one were to find out, at your age or my age, for instance, that one wasn't one's father's child, one would be in a different story. But it would be a completely retrospective different story. The whole of one's life would be exactly the same in every detail, simply that one would have to rewrite the plot. In fact, I think I might be doing that in my current novel. There's a woman who doesn't quite know where her father went to. Her mother said he was killed in the war, but maybe not. So she's writing a lot of stories in her head as to who he might have been. And of course as she gets older, the stories get more and more realistic, because when you're a child, you're told these fantasy stories, and as you get older, the stories get glummer and glummer and more and more dull. Actually, that is quite interesting—that they get duller and duller in an effort to approach the real, or what you as an adult conceive of as the real.

JH: Which is a way of saying that a literary formula of realism is applying.

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MD: Yes. But what if then you have some terrible revelation, having accepted the possibility that it would be really very dull, and then something dreadful actually is revealed when your mother dies, and you find in the papers that she wasn't your mother or something. The whole concept of storytelling, of intertextuality, is fascinating, but I suppose I cling, possibly vainly, to the faith that behind the story, there's a sequence of events, and if I tell enough stories, I will find the true story, the *true* story.

JH: But this sequence of events, I think it often is already a story. Say you had a birth record to prove that you're the legitimate child of the parents that you've always thought were your parents. But what matters is not that there's a piece of paper that testifies to that fact; what matters is that you know what kind of people they are and what kind of effect they had on you. And that's why you care whether they were your parents or not.

MD: So your impulse to prove they weren't your parents would in itself be more significant than the fact that they were or they weren't.

JH: So the significance of the facts depends on the story you tell about them, which in turn determines which facts you tend to pursue.

MD: Of course that is true. My husband [Michael Holroyd] finds this area terribly interesting. Because, of course, as a biographer his job is to find out exactly what happened, not what people said happened. But he would agree with you that the lie, or the misremembered fact, is more true, very often, than what actually happened, which was so insignificant that everybody forgot about it.

JH: That's quite a statement for a biographer to make.

MD: Yes, he says that our lives are built on a sequence of what you would call inventions about what you think had happened. But I then will say to him (we talk about this quite a bit), "Don't you want to know what actually, truly happened?" And he will say that that isn't sometimes the answer.

JH: Well, I think it's an answer to another question. It depends on what question you're asking.

MD: Yes, I suppose you have to get both layers right, and then I suppose, as a biographer, the joy is interweaving them correctly at any point. But when one is the victim of an untrue story, then it is terrible because the story is already believed. It was widely put about at one point that *The Millstone* was my first novel and that I had written it while expecting an illegitimate child—that I put it in a bottom drawer,

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published two other novels, and then brought out this one. I was furious, because it wasn't true. And I thought, "If this story catches on, I'm in trouble" because it seemed an insult to my children, my husband, and everybody. I mean I knew it wasn't true, but I could also see it was a very seductive story. So when one's the victim of a story, one doesn't see it as a good story, one sees it as a lie.

JH: I guess people thought you told the story so well it must have been real. One thing I noticed in your novels is that you often use the word "seem" in conjunction with fate. You say, "it seemed, perhaps, as though fate itself had intervened on Rose's behalf," in *The Needle's Eye*, and, "Fate seemed to have thwarted his [Hugo's] sensible decision to abandon the theatrical military life for a sober intellectual one," in *The Middle Ground*. I am interested in the fact that we have this rational understanding that undercuts our sense of fate while we also have the desire to believe in fate.

MD: I'm obviously very interested in it too because I go on about it. But I can't reduce my reflections on this to a statement. That's why I'm so haunted by it, I suppose, because I don't know. I mean, it does seem that certain points in one's life have been turned one way or the other without one's own intervention. People who deny the role of coincidence in life altogether find it very hard to explain important meetings on railroad trains, that kind of thing. That's what a lot of *The Realms of Gold*'s plot was about, about the missing postcard. I find it very interesting that a tiny accident can actually set off a chain of events. Hardy was very interested in it, but he always made it tragic. In my work it tends to be more ironic or comic because I don't like the idea of these tremendous tragic denouements hanging over a lost letter.

JH: Comedy can hang on coincidence, but not tragedy.

MD: I think so, yes. I think it's a question of tone. And that's a question of my own range as a novelist. When terrible accidents happen in my novels, they tend to happen rather abruptly and offstage—people do get killed, but not very much.

JH: Not in the central events, more like Max Friedman who gets blown up before the novel begins.

MD: Exactly, exactly. That's what I was thinking of. In the novel I'm writing I've just killed off two sort of very early peripheral characters. One chap lost his wife very early, and one lost her husband early. But the thing about "it seems," I'm very interested in that. I noticed in the novel I'm writing I use the phrase, "It was alleged" or "It

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seemed," implying that there's no way of knowing what happened; the novelist just doesn't actually know what happened. I suppose it's the inponderability of fate or sequence that is so interesting.

JH: Would you compare the novelist's vision with the "aerial view" that Anthony Keating has in *The Ice Age* and Kate Armstrong and Evelyn Stennet share in *The Middle Ground*?

MD: Yes, it's that kind of view—where you suddenly see connections that you hadn't seen. And that makes you feel slightly god-like. And I wonder if very wise people, Doris Lessing for instance, probably do see all kinds of patterns that those of us stuck in the story of our own life don't see. Where that connects with fate, I don't know. Except that the more one sees, the more one knows the outcome, the next stage.

JH: Do you really feel Doris Lessing has a grander vision, can see things that others of us can't see?

MD: I do, actually, yes. I don't mean that in any mystic sense; I mean that she's a woman of such extraordinary intellectual energy and perception, and she's read so widely and experienced so much, that she probably does see a bigger pattern than most people. And I suppose the idea of God being all-seeing is very interesting.

JH: Humans have a deep need to feel that way.

MD: Yes, they have a need to feel themselves part of a pattern that makes some kind of sense. But, of course, one always has the worry that the more of the pattern one sees, the less sense there could be. It could all be deeply meaningless.

JH: In that regard, I think you question, in *The Ice Age*, if accident creates order in providential terms. Anthony calls his financial recovery, "Such a bad plot." Could you elaborate on the phrase "bad plot"? Specifically what kind of plot did you have in mind? And in what ways was his recovery either like a bad plot or not like a bad plot?

MD: Well it's so unsatisfactory. Either he should have gone really bust, or he should have made a lot of money. As it is, he's just sort of bailed out, as I recall. He just sort of survived. It's not a good plot in that nothing happens in either extreme. This could have been a tremendous tragedy, and there could have been a sort of Zola character, dying in the gutter and having to sell his house, and everything could have been very extreme. Or he could have risen up and forged on and made his million.

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JH: Or he could have become more moral at that point. The strain could have pushed him farther in the direction than it did of reassessing his values, as he does at the end.

MD: But in fact the financial rescue is neither here nor there—well, that's a bad plot. The whole experience hasn't gone anywhere. It's gone back to where it was.

JH: So "bad plot" there means "not melodrama." You say it's a "bad plot," but what you really mean is that it's a good plot because it does not have extremely dramatic turns, and so is realistic.

MD: Absolutely correct. It's also true that I had thought of many other denouements. And in fact I did originally plan to write the novel in a completely different way—in a much more extreme Zolaesque way, but I found I couldn't do it. So in a way, that would have been a "good" plot. I mean, I immensely admire Zola. If I had been somebody else, I could have written a "good" plot, which would have been very extreme.

JH: He would follow a spiral down into jail and then down, down.

MD: Really down and into jail, and that would have been very, very interesting.

JH: But he ends up in jail anyway.

MD: Ah, but in the wrong jail.

JH: Not the jail that he deserves, the jail that he doesn't deserve.

MD: The jail that he doesn't deserve. If he'd ended up in the jail that he did deserve, that would have been interesting. But it wasn't a novel that I personally could write. And I don't know whether that was a lack of confidence or lack of courage, or whether in fact my plot is a better plot. I just don't know. It is very bizarre how life imitates art as they say, but some of the characters in that narrative, and what happened to them, are most peculiar. They are all people I knew that I based them on. The middle characters did have a "bad" plot in that they just carry on. But some of them came to terrible accidents. I wanted to write it more from the point of view of the aspiring working class, of a lad who'd made an enormous amount of money and lost an enormous amount of money, because I think that is a fascinating kind of plot. I think Arnold Bennett could have done it, and Zola could have done it. But partly because I'm a woman, and partly because I'm the kind of writer I am, I tried again and again to do it, but I couldn't actually do it. So my apology, in a way, is a sincere apology.

JH: Jane Gray, near the end of *The Waterfall*, thinks back over her

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affair and says, "I felt, at times, that I could see the machinery work, that I was simply living out some textbook pattern of relationship." What do you understand by that? Is this an apology for writing a "good plot," a conventional story?

MD: I suppose it's the adulteress plot. I remember reading D. de Rougemont's *Passion and Society* when I was quite young, and that quotes a lot of instances. In a way there's an element of *Madame Bovary*, and the adulteress relationship, that's the only one dignified enough for fiction. Of course *Madame Bovary* is a travesty of it, as indeed is *The Waterfall*. Nevertheless, there's a very deeply embedded notion that the forbidden passion is the furious passion; also, that it should be fatal. It's adulterous, and you're meant to die at the end of it—Romeo and Juliet. You're meant to be separated by circumstances, then violently, against your will joined—Tristan and Isolde, I suppose, and Cathy and Heathcliff, in *Wuthering Heights*, whose final reunion was adulterous and fatal. Oh, and *The Mill on the Floss*, yes; there is the idea of being swept helplessly down the current. In terms of fate, Maggie Tulliver resists and doesn't go off with Steve, whereas George Eliot and George Henry Lewes did go off with one another. In a way I was trying to say that Jane and James couldn't have behaved as Steven and Maggie Tulliver did, and neither could Steven and Maggie Tulliver have behaved as they did if they really felt what Maggie Tulliver appears to feel. She would have said yes as George Eliot did and got on with it. But, yes, passion is that overwhelming of moral sense, and that is part of the textbook pattern. What I wasn't at all sure about was the very close connection between Lucy and Jane. The fact that they were cousins, that it was adultery with a relative, was very important; it made it worse as a situation. I suppose Tristan was Mark's nephew, so it is a kind of incestuous passion. He is violating two sets of moral oaths: that of kinship and the relationship of master and lord.

I do find the concept of romantic love in the Western world very peculiar—the fact that allegedly until the troubadours started singing about it, it didn't really exist. I can hardly credit that. But I suppose that this adulterous paradigm is something that has certainly haunted Western literature and also Western life. Simone de Beauvoir is very interesting about it. She says quite categorically, in *The Second Sex*, that women who marry as virgins or as inexperienced women very rarely achieve a happy sexual relationship with their husbands; therefore they have to look to adultery for the passion, the sex, the abandon that they can't find with their husbands. I'm sure that is a pattern that was reflected in fiction and in fact. So I suppose that's what I meant by

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“textbook.” It was a literary text, but also a kind of well-known, Freudian casebook of a woman who can’t find sexual happiness with her husband and therefore kind of automatically looks to the next person.

JH: By using those terms, “the machinery” and “textbook pattern,” Jane’s trying to diminish through self-referentiality the control her passion has on her life, isn’t she?

MD: Yes, it’s absolutely true that is what she’s doing. It’s also true that, in my novels, when women describe their experience of universal motherhood, which is a textbook relationship, they never refer to it in that diminishing sense. They never refer to it as something that makes them look silly. They always look upon it as something enlarging and the universality as something valuable to them. Whereas the universality or the repetitiveness of an adulterous relationship makes one feel silly, as Emma Bovary is silly.

JH: So the romantic pattern is bred out of a perhaps immature reconciliation between duty and desire?

MD: Yes, I suppose it is immature that the desire and the duty conflict. But it’s also a very real situation. You only have to look in the evening paper any day, and you’ll see that somebody’s shot somebody or run away. The most violent and dreadful things happen as a result of this strand in human nature. I suppose when you’re not suffering from it, it does seem ludicrous—in a way that a mother’s worry for her son never seems.

JH: Would you ever call anxiety as a mother or father a terrible illness?

MD: No, I think it’s completely normal. And by that I mean good, which means I’m using normative words about socially acceptable behavior. Some women novelists very much dislike the way I write about maternity, and say I only praise what is socially acceptable.

JH: Let me question you on that. You do have some mothers who, in their maternal feelings, make a mess of themselves. I’m thinking of Judith Mainwaring in *The Middle Ground* or Alison Murray in *The Ice Age*, mothers whose anxiety for their children becomes obsessive.

MD: Yes, it goes wrong in some way. It certainly can go wrong, but sexual passion can hardly ever go right it seems. There’s something about the particularly violent passion that *The Waterfall* is about that cannot be accommodated socially. My husband says that I have far too rosy a view of parent/child relationships and the normal family, which

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he looks upon as a breeding ground of the most dreadful perversions of behavior. Now I always think of the family as being potentially normal, though not in fact always so—one only has to look around to see it's not always so—but potentially normal. Whereas I suppose violent sexual passion is very rarely expressed normally and to the satisfaction of everybody concerned. It usually does involve pain and damage and exclusion of some other party. It switches off, like that marvelous phrase of Juliet, in *Romeo and Juliet*, "It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden; / Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be / Ere one can say 'It lightens.'" And that of course is the excitement, the danger of being involved in something so precarious.

JH: And you yourself have said that your life can't change unless you have some of that irrational, unpredictable excitement. So it may be necessary to disrupt your life that way. I see Kate Armstrong as being a woman who feels like she'd like to have her life disrupted by something—either romance, or something comfortable to her—but keeps opting for more stable, safe patterns of motherhood.

MD: Yes. Carrying on in much the same kind of way she's used to. I think that's right; she might well have wanted something shocking to happen, but she's getting over it. She can't quite be bothered in the way Jane Gray was in *The Waterfall*. Is that wisdom, or is it just cowardice? I don't know. She has made herself a little fairy-tale cottage, really, a cozy little cottage where everybody's happy and jolly. There's a bit of *Little Women* in it.

JH: You have used the phrase, "cooperative grace" to mean "being in tune with your fate," and I would like to know what that means. If you're in tune with your fate, does that imply you could be out of tune with your fate?

MD: Yes. It implies that you could be struggling against your natural fate, does it? I suppose you could be out of tune with your fate. But you might then say that your fate was to be out of tune with your fate, so it's a kind of tautologous statement. I suppose by "fate," one could mean one's own natural destiny, and one can thwart one's natural destiny by refusing to accept opportunities, refusing to obey one's inner nature, refusing to listen to hints that are given to one. One can deny one's self, one's natural destiny.

JH: It does have that emphasis, when you say it's natural, in the way that a novel or play ought to bring out what is organically real about a character. Then on the other hand, we do use it to describe the purely

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accidental. In *The Needle's Eye*, you say at one point that Rose's nature was to be modest, but fate had thrust her into notoriety, meaning all the publicity and gossip about her marriage. Now there "fate" is really different from her inherent character.

MD: Yes, that's talking about two different concepts of fate. The concept that it's external and the concept that it's internal. Yes, it's two contradictory usages. But of course, the concept itself does contain that ambiguity. I don't think that I use the word with any constant meaning. I think I use it in terms of context and in terms of definition within a context, or suggestion within a context.

JH: Does Rose Vasiliou act in tune with her fate when she returns to Christopher in *The Needle's Eye*?

MD: I don't know really. I think it's partly that she just couldn't bear going on fighting anymore. I mean, she gave in, really. And I suppose she recognizes that.

JH: But she'd won the battle.

MD: She'd won the battle, yes.

JH: Then why give it up?

MD: Well I suppose she thought that he had a right to his own children. It is terribly difficult when two people have equal rights to decide. And her way of resolving it was to accede the rights, once she'd won the right not to.

JH: For some people, that really strongly diminishes her character, in that it makes her seem masochistic; I mean, she didn't have to marry Christopher again in order to let him have a share of the children.

MD: No, she didn't. But Christopher is not bad really, he's quite attractive in some ways. It's quite interesting, I'd forgotten about that remarriage; I'm just toying with the idea of two completely unsuited people remarrying again in a little time at the moment. And I find it quite interesting. I suppose long, difficult relationships between people that nevertheless persist, are quite interesting. Particularly now that people can get divorced quite easily. You can get divorced, but you can't actually get rid of the person. I was always rather shocked by people who managed to get divorced and never to see the other person again, which, I think, is quite unusual. I suppose I think Rose went back to Christopher because she acceded to his demands; she wasn't sure that she was doing the right thing, but she felt that it would be better, somehow. Also, it makes her more a human person, doesn't it? She set herself up rather as being the person who knew, and I think I wanted to

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know that she didn't know, that she was just confused and most of the time wrong. I think it's also true that if the marriage hadn't worked out the second time, by the time the children had grown up, they would separate.

JH: I think that's implied.

MD: It was very much to do with the children, which in a way is what *The Garrick Year* is about. How, if you've got children, all sorts of pressures are put on you as a couple that aren't put upon you if you don't have children, or when your children are grown up. So it was to do with the nature of a father's investment in his children as well as to do with Rose's own sense of her own life.

JH: In *The Garrick Year*, as well as in *The Needle's Eye*, you get the feeling that the woman is making more of a sacrifice than the man. I think feminists have found this unsatisfying to them.

MD: Well, they may find it unsatisfying, but do they find it unrealistic? I mean, is one portraying life as it is, or life as it should be?

JH: That it is normal for the woman to give up more in order to preserve the relation to children?

MD: Well of course it's normal; it's what usually happens. I don't like the way the feminists think I ought to be writing a blueprint for everybody's life. I don't see that at all. I see it as my job to show what actually happens, and then other people can ask the question about whether they ought to have done it or not. I know I had a very strong sense, when I finished *The Needle's Eye*, that this was real; this is the way people behave—illogically. Good people behave foolishly; bad people behave astonishingly well. The jumble of human affairs is so peculiar, not at all the kind of thing that, if you were plotting for them, you would plot. They just do it. I had a very strong sense that Rose just did that at the end. I thought, what do I do? Do I just let her stick it out? And I thought no, there's not really all that much future for her on her own. I was also quite pleased with the Simon/Julia relationship at the end and the fact that Julia and Rose got quite friendly. I thought that seemed to be a kind of lowering of temperature to a normal survival situation in which they would have got on with it. Which I think is what a lot of people do when they've got children. I mean, all through the book the children, despite the fact that they've had a rough time, are put first in a sense, and everybody else just has to accommodate. And I think a lot of people do that. Maybe they ought not to, but they do.

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JH: Would you say that literature can prepare one for an unknowable, irrational fate?

MD: I think Jane says, somewhere in *The Waterfall*, that she "Doesn't know what unimaginable stroke of fate the pattern, the machine, will throw up over the years to come." I've sometimes felt like that about the people I know in my life and am connected with. I can't, of course I can't, see the end. But I know that there is going to be something, and I think, "Well, what is this plot?" But of course it's my plot. It is my plot; I am writing it every day of my life. No one else is writing it. But I feel as though, if I could just jump ahead and look back, I could see it. So I don't have this conscious sense of decision and choice. But logically I ought to have, as I am doing it.

JH: How much do you feel that your life is really as much in your control as your novels are, and how much of it is controlled by others?

MD: Quite a lot of it is controlled by others, yes. Well, this is what's so interesting, the interconnection between one's own control and other people's control over one. There are certain "events" that have taken place in my circle of friends that have astonished me, but which have been totally predictable at the same time. When you look at them from a sufficiently distant viewpoint, you think, "Of course!" And then it looks like a very good plot. You think, "Yes! Because she had to meet up with him, and they had to marry."

JH: And your feeling that it all works out right, well, the opposite could have happened, and you could still say that it's right.

MD: Yes. You'd say, "Of course she didn't marry him." It would have looked like a very good plot, whatever had happened. I reread *Anna Karenina* a couple of months ago. There's a wonderful scene where Levin's brother, Koznyshev, almost proposes to the not-so-young woman, Varenka, while they are mushrooming in the woods. And everyone knows that he might propose. There is a very detailed description of how it doesn't happen. It is wonderful. And I suppose there are all the sorts of moments where things don't happen. And I do have a daily sense, a sort of daily awareness, that at any moment to the plot, which one thinks one controls in one's life, something utterly dreadful could happen. Like an airplane crash. My youngest son is in Israel at the moment, quite near the border, and I think, "I just don't accept that plot at all," yet that is the kind of the thing that could happen. That's rather like Judith Mainwaring in *The Middle Ground*: something utterly off the cards happens, and your life is forever altered.

Robert Graves's Poem "O": Wresting Meaning from the Alphabet

JOSEPH E. GRENNEN

Academics, and other pedantic or withdrawn types perceived as falling short of a passionate engagement with life, have not, as a rule, been treated very cordially by poets. Chaucer's Oxford Clerk, demure and proper to the point of being epicene, and his echo in Eliot's neurotically impotent Prufrock, frame an English tradition of satirical portraits of the bookish and socially awkward character. Shakespeare's Holofernes, Earle's "character" of the "downright scholar," Pope's dunces, Browning's grammarian, and Yeats's respectable, shuffling, bald-headed scholars, to mention just a few, are well-known instances. Robert Graves's "moribund grammarian," in the poem titled simply "O," has a firm if minor place in this tradition:

"O per se O, O per se O!",
The moribund grammarian cried
To certain scholars grouped at his bedside,
Spying the round, dark pit a-gape below:
*"O per se O!"*¹

The collected poems show numerous variations on the theme. In "Pure Death" the intensity of passionate love is seen to put death in clearer focus, liberating the mind from received complacencies:

By love we disenthralled our natural terror
From every comfortable philosopher
Or tall, grey doctor of divinity:
Death stood at last in his true rank and order.²

In "Broken Neck" the radiologist with his pedantic medical pieties and prescription of a "Swiss analgesic" for the pain of a fractured sixth cervical vertebra is dismissed contemptuously:

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Love, I still laugh it off
 And all Swiss mercenary alleviations,
 For though I broke my neck in God's good time
 It is in yours alone I choose to live.³

The discussion of "O" which follows is meant to situate the poem more clearly in a position within this thematic group. By suggesting something of the richness of background this brief poem stands against, I hope to clarify in a small way the nature of allusiveness (the more modish term would be intertextuality) in Graves's lyric work.

The poem, which appeared originally in the *Oxford Magazine* in 1962, was reprinted in Graves's collection *Man Does, Woman Is* in 1964, and a year later in his *Collected Poems*.⁴ In the 1964 volume (which contained sections XVI and XVII of his accumulating collection) Graves remarked in a headnote that the poems of section XVII, which contains "O," were written under less emotional tension than those of section XVI. And although "O" may be felt to be rather insignificant by comparison with such major imaginative lyrics as "To Juan at the Winter Solstice," it does have a curious sort of interest both as an example of grammatological play, and as showing in its use of a snatch of Jacobean street argot Graves's familiarity with out-of-the-way linguistic sources.

He was by his own admission a haunter of lexicons. Somewhere in his essays Graves admits to reading the *OED* for linguistic inspiration before embarking upon the composition of a poem, a claim which is borne out by his frequent resort to a recondite vocabulary. Even a hasty, random sampling of his collected poems turns up such words as *chumbling*, *voles*, *theodolist*, *ravelin*, *haulms*, *tourbillions*, *upas*, *craquelure*, *sooterkin*, *fulvous*, *callant*, *cramoisy*, *mandalot*, and *sained*. It should perhaps be remarked that in his use of exotic vocabulary Graves rather resembles poets like Stevens and Thomas than, let us say, T. S. Eliot. That is, he seems less conscious of the accumulated encrustations of meaning than of the effects wrought by sound, look, association, all the extralexical elements that make up the "corporeality" of a word.⁵ This is not to say, of course, that he is careless with respect to the semantic history of the words he employs.

If Graves's reading in the *OED* indeed played a part in the poetic process, it might be instructive to consider the form such influence could have taken. One of the "hard words" in the above list, for example, occurs in the poem "Hercules at Nemea." There the lyric persona presents himself in the image of an archer-hero arrayed against his Muse, envisaged as a lioness, who has maimed the poet by biting

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through a finger. The second of the two stanzas begins: "See me a fulvous hero of nine fingers— / Sufficient grasp for bow and arrow."⁶ For the word "fulvous" the *OED* entry provides on principle not only the etymology (L. *fulvus*, reddish-brown, tawny), but a number of examples of its usage over time. As the last of five illustrative citations the editors include a line from Lowell's *Biglow Papers*: "A Nemean lion, fulvous, torrid-eyed."⁷ Thus the strong possibility exists that whatever the ultimate genesis of the poem in Graves's psychic wrestlings with his White Goddess the peculiar habiliments of the conception owe something to the *OED*. Perhaps the point is not of major importance; yet this kind of sensitivity to lexical exotica is a fact to be reckoned with in any appraisal of Graves's poetic method.

The *OED* (not, after all, a handbook of curious idioms, though there is much knowledge of this sort to be garnered in passing) has no entry for *O per se*. It does, however, cite the phrase under the entry for the letter "O," where it is explained as "the letter O forming by itself a word, as in the interjection O!" Cross-reference is also made to the phrases *A per se* and *I per se*.⁸ The various meanings which O can have when taken as a word by itself include: finality (O as the Greek omega); designation of the particular negative (in Logic); a mere nothing (from resemblance to zero); and, merely, any round thing. Among the examples of this last sense are the mouth (presumably when the lips are parted in astonishment), and Giotto's O, the perfect circle the painter is reputed to have been able to throw off freehand. A citation from Ruskin is of peculiar interest for its ironic application of this image to the ethereal concerns of grammarians: "I saw . . . that the practical teaching of the masters of Art was summed by the O of Giotto." Now while it is not impossible for Graves to have arrived at the implications of finality, negativity, insignificance, astonishment, and so forth, by simple intuition, it seems likely that the *OED* played a part in the inspirational process, especially on the point of the utter futility of a life dedicated exclusively to grammatical pedantry.

Other, more purely literary, influences were probably also at work. Graves may be presumed to have had Browning's well known "A Grammarian's Funeral" in mind, a poem, which although it is much longer, is very similar in spirit to "O." A few verses will serve to make the point:

So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar;
Still, through the rattle, parts of speech were rife:
While he could stammer

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He settled *Hoti's* business—let it be!
 Properly based *Oun*—
 Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,
 Dead from the waist down.

(vv. 125–32)⁹

While their intellectual stances are similar, Graves's faint and somewhat bemused pathos is obviously of a different order from Browning's savage irony. There is probably more to be said for the outlook Graves shares with Yeats, especially the Yeats of *The Wild Swans at Coole*, in which the anti-pedantic attitude, the contempt for a society in which "logic-choppers rule the town,"¹⁰ is a conspicuous theme, a theme most explicitly developed in "The Scholars":

Bald heads forgetful of their sins,
 Old, learned, respectable bald heads
 Edit and annotate the lines
 That young men, tossing on their beds,
 Rhymed out in love's despair. . . .

(vv. 1–5)¹¹

Although it is clear from other statements of his that Yeats had a high regard for learning, it was for a learning backed by aesthetic and emotional involvement. Scholarly drudgery, performed by the bloodless drones of academe, held no charm.

So much for the general question of theme, and for any light which the *OED* entry can shed on the implications not only of the letter O but of the phrase "O per se." The precise form of the phrase at issue, as employed by Graves, however, namely "O per se O," calls for somewhat closer scrutiny. While it does not come in for comment in the *OED*, Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* explains it as a seventeenth-century underworld term for a crier, and cites Dekker in support.¹² Now, Thomas Dekker's oblique way of expressing himself, which seems to have had considerable appeal for his contemporaries, can be quite off-putting to a modern reader, and it is by no means luminously clear from his use of the phrase that the meaning "crier" settles the matter once and for all.

In fact, it seems fairly certain from the very tenor of Dekker's tract *O per se—O*,¹³ which concerns the underworld figures supposedly encountered and reported on by the Bellman as he makes his rounds with "lantern and candlelight" crying the curfew, that "O per se O," whatever its origin, was a call for curfew. We ought perhaps to remember here that "curfew" (Fr. *couvre-feu*) referred in its beginnings to the banking of a fire, and presumably also came to include the

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extinguishing of candles. The Latin phrase for this action—attested as late as 1570—was *operitio ignis*,¹⁴ and the suggestion may be allowed that we have in this phrase the origin of the crier's call of curfew as we find it in Dekker. That is to say, the Latin word *operitio* (a by-form of *opertio*) was corrupted by gradual slight changes in pronunciation to [o-per-ə-'si-o], and was at last understood as "o per se o," confusion between *t* and *c*, as graphs in late medieval Latin texts, being very common, and pointing to a similar confusion of the sounds the scribes intended to represent. What construction may have been put upon it at that point, however, it is impossible to say. Almost invariably, Latin tags which pass into popular parlance suffer a sea change, often with a garbling of meaning, as words like "nincompoop" and "hocus-pocus" readily illustrate. Dekker's worrying of the term suggests a genuine concern to extract some meaning from it, but genuine or not his efforts leave the result quite opaque.

The very incomprehensibility of the phrase, indeed, might explain its utility as an all-purpose euphemism. There is one clear instance, for example, of its use as a euphemism for sexual intercourse, translating the canting term *wap*. Since the tract has as one of its alleged purposes to explain underworld cant so that citizens may be on their guard against being swindled, Dekker's circumlocutory style is at times baffling and frustrating. At one point he remarks:

For if you note them [underworld rogues] well in their marching, not a tatterdemalion walks his round, be he young, be he old, but he hath his *mort* or his *doxy* at his heels (his "woman" or his "whore") for, in hunting of their rascal deer, this "law" they hold when they come to strike a doe: if she will not *wap* for a win, let her *trine* for a make (if she will not ". . . O per se—O. . . for a penny," let her "hang for a halfpenny").¹⁵

Of course, the phrase as used here may not be as chaste a euphemism as it appears, since the use of O as a cry of sexual gratification, particularly a woman's cry, can be found in previous literature, even as early as the medieval period. A good example is the final (badly mutilated) poem in the Latin manuscript collection known as the "Cambridge Songs." This "woman's song," as Raby terms it, is a frankly erotic plea for sexual fulfillment, as the following excerpt clearly demonstrates:

si cum clave veneris
et a et o,
mox intrare poteris
et a et o et a et o.

(May you then with love's key

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And a and o [i.e. ah and oh]
 Soon have power to enter
 And a and o and a and o.)¹⁶

In addition to representing cries, there may have been some justifying (hence mollifying) grammatological significance, the letters standing for words which a knowing audience would understand. There is an analogy to be found in a group of vernacular lyrics in English, in which various letters are used in a refrain; they are commonly referred to as lyrics with the "O and I" refrain. Whether the letters in these poems are to be taken as cries or have a grammatological significance (or may indeed be a combination of both) is an issue yet to be settled.¹⁷ For our purposes here their importance resides mainly in the fact that they testify to a poetic tradition in which letters carry a considerable freight of poetic meaning, a tradition to which Graves's poem may be said to belong.

Quite apart from the various senses noted thus far, it is Pendry's opinion that the phrase is "possibly [a] reference to the interjection 'Oh!' as a cry of indignation or crier's call, or to nought (with a pun on 'naught' meaning 'evil-doing'), or more probably to a clown's clumsy reading of a charm to summon up devils in the 1616 *Doctor Faustus*."¹⁸ This last suggestion seems improbable, but leaving aside the question of Dekker's possible familiarity with Marlowe's play, it is conceivable that Graves may himself have recalled the phrase as it appears in the 1616 quarto of *Faustus*. The 1616 elaborators of the play add a farcical scene in which the clown, Robin, somewhat in the manner of a student grammarian, attempts to construe the text in one of Faustus' conjuring books:

Rob. I walke the horses? I scorn't 'faith, I have other matters in hand, let the horses walk themselues and they will. (*Reads*) *A perse a, t. h. e the: o per se o deny orgon, gorgon: keepe further from me O thou illiterate, and vnlearned Hostler.*¹⁹

What adds to the likelihood of Graves's having had *Dr. Faustus* in mind is the very meaning of his poem, a poem which could plausibly be defined as a comic version in epitome of the tragic conclusion of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. Faustus, though he may be a moral reprobate, is a genuine scholar and a man with an insatiable yen for new experience—the Renaissance overreacher with an appetite for both of those medieval (especially Chaucerian) antinomies of "experience" and "auctoritee." As the hour of his damnation grows nearer, Faustus, in his anguish, gives vent to a series of plaintive O's:

O lente, lente currite noctis equi . . . (1428)

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O Ile leape vp to my God . . . (1431)
 oh spare me *Lucifer*! (1435)
 Oh God . . . Impose some end to my incessant paine.
 (1452-55)
 O it strikes, it strikes . . . (1470)

And so forth. Then, finally:

Adders and Serpents, let me breathe a while:
 Vgly hell gape not, come not *Lucifer*,
 Ile burne my bookes, ah Mephastophilis.
 (1475-77)²⁰

In effect, Graves's grammarian, babbling a grammatical nullity in the face of the gaping pit opening on eternity, is a parodic version of the man who faces his tragic destiny in an imaginative if not a great-souled way.

One would scarcely wish to press the analogy with *Dr. Faustus* too hard, and it is perhaps safest to regard Graves's poem as being more casual than determinedly mordant. Another way to put it is to say that the spirit of Dekker seems more pertinent here than that of Marlowe. And although a good bit of the complex of meaning surrounding the phrase "*O per se o*" can be teased out of the *OED* entry, the likelihood that Graves was familiar with Dekker's tract and drew upon it seems an inescapable conclusion. Indeed, the very form of his poem shows a remarkable similarity to a canting rhyme reproduced by Dekker. The persona Dekker adopts, as one eventually comes to understand, is that of a pious citizen whose outrage and befuddlement engender in him a whimsical sort of indirection verging on the mendacious. Again and again, and brazenly, he flouts the reader's desire for genuine clarification; then, pretending finally that he is about to unlock the secret of the phrase, he leaves the matter as obscure as before:

. . . I will here teach you what *O per se*—*O* is, being nothing else but the burden of a song set by the Devil and sung by his choir; of which I will set no more down but the beginning because the middle is detestable, the end abominable and all of it damnable.

And he quotes:

Wilt thou a-begging go?
O per se—*O*, *O per se*—*O*!
 Wilt thou a-begging go?
 Yes, verily, yea!
 Then thou must God forsake
 And to stealing thee betake.
O per se—*O*, *O per se*—*O*!
 Yes, verily, yea, etc.²¹

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Readers of Graves's poem may feel that he has, similarly, left the issue somewhat beclouded, drawing as he does on a fairly extensive range of possible meanings for a poem of such modest limits. In any case, not only do his sources almost certainly include Dekker's tract *O per se—O*, but the connection of the phrase with the grammarian may owe something to Dekker's pretense that as a student of underworld jargon, he stands to those who can enlighten him on the subject as pupil to grammatical master. For a warrant of authenticity and a framing fiction, Dekker at one point pretends to have had in his hire a diabolical, albeit winsome, rogue, who became his tutor in the ways and words of the London underworld: "What intelligence I got from him or any other trained up in the same rudiments of roguery I will briefly, plainly and truly set down as I had it from my devilish schoolmaster, whom I call by the name of *O per se—O*." The technical Latin sense of *per se* (in and of itself, in reality), and the fact that it was in this sense used as a precise grammatical term, may have inclined Dekker to the designation.²² But whatever the form of Dekker's imaginative logic, the association was there for Graves to have drawn upon, providing a strategy, we might say, for ironically demonstrating the subsidence of orotundity into mere rotundity, with the various implications of vacuousness implied by it.

¹ Robert Graves, *Collected Poems* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor-Doubleday, 1966), p. 382.

² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁴ Robert Graves, "Two New Poems: Confiteor Ut Fas—O," *Oxford Magazine*, NS 2 (1962), 255. Reprinted in *Man Does, Woman Is* (London: Cassell, 1964), p. 58.

⁵ The best discussion of the "corporeality" of words in poems that I am familiar with is to be found in Winifred Nowotny's *The Language Poets Use* (London: Athlone Press, 1962). See, especially, Chapter 1, "Elements of Poetic Language."

⁶ Graves, *Collected Poems*, p. 222.

⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "fulvous."

⁸ *Ibid.*, s.v. "O."

⁹ Robert Browning, "A Grammarian's Funeral," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams et al., 4th ed., 2 vols. (New York: Norton, 1979), II, 1283.

¹⁰ "Tom O'Roughley," in W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 139.

¹¹ Yeats, "The Scholars," *Collected Poems*, p. 139.

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¹² Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), p. 577.

¹³ *O per se—O* is a section of Dekker's *Lanthorne and Candle-light* (London, 1608) added to the 1612 edition. See Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderful Year*, ed. E. D. Pendry, Stratford-upon-Avon Library 4 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968). Pendry suggests (p. 322) that *O per se—O* was perhaps written by another and merely touched up by Dekker, or that it might even be the work of one trying to imitate Dekker's style.

¹⁴ R. E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), s.v. "opertio."

¹⁵ Pendry, *Dekker*, p. 286.

¹⁶ F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), II, 330.

¹⁷ In an article forthcoming in *Neophilologus* I argue that the refrain letters should be taken as grammatological (that is, as standing for words) rather than as idiophonic.

¹⁸ Pendry, *Dekker*, p. 351. Since *O per se—O* was first added to Dekker's work in 1612, however, Pendry's connection of it with the 1616 *Faustus* is puzzling.

¹⁹ *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), p. 196.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 192–94.

²¹ Pendry, *Dekker*, p. 289.

²² Pendry, *ibid.*, p. 351, notes that "in reading aloud the pupil indicated a syllabic letter or character by 'per se.'" The *OED* explanation, however, suggests that it is the independent lexical rather than syllabic status that is being emphasized.

The Author's Play: from *Red Noses, Black Death* to *Red Noses*

BERNARD F. DUKORE

Not only do the experiences of reading and seeing a play differ from each other, the play that is read differs from the play that is performed. In the Jacobean age, publishers sometimes tried to persuade readers otherwise: the title page of Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* (1601) claims that the volume presents the play "As it hath beene sundry times publickly acted by the right Honorable the Lord Chamberlaine his servants." At other times, publishers promised to give readers more dialogue than audiences heard in a theater: the title page of John Marston's *The Malcontent* (1604) states that the text has been "Augmented by Marston." Ingeniously, the publishers of John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623) employ both come-ons: the title page claims to print the tragedy "As it was presented priuatly, at the Black-Friers; and publicquely at the Globe, By the Kings Maiesties Seruants. The perfect and exact Coppy, with diuerse things Printed, that the length of the Play would not beare in the Presentment"—in other words, what was acted in private and public theaters plus passages that would have made these performances too long.¹ Anyone familiar with theater practice would agree that the first example is the least credible.

Nowadays, cast lists (usually of the first production) following the title page hint that the play one reads is a record of the play spectators saw. Rarely does an author indicate that the printed text includes what he had cut from the first production.² Nevertheless, the discrepancy between performed and published play is at least as great today as it was

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in Jacobean times. As Tom Stoppard admits, one publishes the text of a play, after which "one adjusts the event with the cooperation of the director and the actors, and insofar as the adjustments include alterations in what is spoken, one is then in a position to bring the printed page into conformity with what is occurring on stage." Anticipating a return to the theater the following day to rehearse another company of *The Real Thing*, he declares, "The 'book' is already out of date and has been for months, despite my publishers' generous attempts to catch up with the event. If they caught up again, I would betray them again the next time I was in rehearsal."³ Whether a change originates with a director, actor, or designer, the new version, if the author approves the change, results in what is as much the author's play as the original or the revised text on the page.

The published texts of Peter Barnes's original plays are always longer than these plays in performance. Among his unusual qualities as a dramatist, he turned to this occupation five years *after* he began to write screenplays, which he still does.⁴ What one may call the movie writer's syndrome affects his playwriting: he assumes that once his work is in production, a director will make cuts and changes to conform to his own viewpoint, the particular theater's technical requirements, and the cast's abilities. The published texts of his plays represent the fullest possible final versions, which he expects different directors to cut and perhaps rearrange differently. To Barnes, such alterations represent a "given," which is the reason he wants the most complete text to appear in print. There are many roads, he believes, to reach the same destination, each version of a play representing one such road. For better or worse, each is the author's play.

With *Red Noses*, the consequences of two major revisions are for better *and* for worse. A comparative examination of its three versions highlights their differences, reveals advantages and disadvantages, and results in an increased understanding of what one may call authorial responsibility. The first, titled *Red Noses, Black Death* and completed in what the author considered its final form in September 1978, is the basis of the analysis in *The Theater of Peter Barnes*, which calls it his greatest and most complex work to date.⁵ The second, retitled *Red Noses* and finished in January 1985, is the text the Royal Shakespeare Company agreed to produce, the text used when it began rehearsals in May, and the text published at the end of June.⁶ This is the version available to readers or to anyone preparing to produce the play. By July 2, 1985, when the RSC opened its production to the press,⁷ *Red Noses* had changed significantly. Reviewers assessed the third version, which

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won the Laurence Olivier Award as Best Drama of 1985. Whereas the change from *Red Noses, Black Death* to *Red Noses*, as this analysis will attempt to demonstrate, has both advantages and disadvantages, the transformation of *Red Noses* on page to *Red Noses* on the RSC stage, as this essay will also try to show, resulted in a virtual evisceration of theme and a considerable conventionalization of theatrical technique.

Thematically, Barnes's plays, of which *Red Noses* is typical, are subversive of the political, economic, and religious Establishment. Stylistically, they are, as he proclaims and as critics concur, antinaturalistic and neo-Jacobean, somewhat in the manner of Ben Jonson, whom he admires this side of idolatry and whose works he has edited, adapted, and directed. Mordantly and hilariously satiric, Barnes's plays blend a truculent vision of human beings in society with bold theatricality. They include outrageous gags, some with sources in burlesque and music hall, *Joe Miller's Joke Book*, and *Ben Johnson's Jest Book* [sic], all side by side with literary allusions; references to popular culture, such as songs and movies, in tandem with archaic diction and words of his own invention; poetic passages interspersed with vulgar and sometimes obscene phrases; ritual mixed with slapstick. They employ methods associated with, and partly derived from, Brechtian epic theater and Artaudian theater of cruelty. Sprawling panoramas that turn on a sixpence (that is, switch styles instantaneously) and are deliberately grotesque, they eschew tidiness in both dramatic and theatrical style.⁸

Red Noses is set in the fourteenth century, during the Black Death, which ravaged Europe. With death seeming to strike at random, the young, strong, rich, and powerful might expire as swiftly as the old, weak, poor, and powerless; in fact, for no apparent reason, the latter group might survive the former. To repel or remedy the plague, people tried a variety of methods, some extremely bizarre. In some locales, chaos and anarchy prevailed. Many of those above feared not only death but also social upheaval, which a number of those below struggled to achieve.

Before analyzing the results of the changes from *Red Noses, Black Death* to *Red Noses*, let me first summarize and interpret the play. Because, as mentioned earlier, the text that the reader is likely to consult is *Red Noses*, I will focus on it, while referring at first to *Red Noses, Black Death*, later to the RSC production of *Red Noses*.

I.i: Plague victims seek protection from the plague through such quack remedies as pouring menstrual blood on oneself and smelling flowers and herbs (in *Red Noses, Black Death*, the sequence follows a

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Prologue). They are joined by Dr. Antrechau, who drunkenly expounds on the plague's causes and his futile efforts to cure it (he arrives later in *Red Noses, Black Death*, in a scene with corpse carters). In an expository soliloquy, Father Flote, the play's protagonist, explains the origins of the Black Death, its toll in human lives and suffering ("One third of Christendom now lies under sod. . . . There's no pity, faith or love left, when the breath, touch or look of a loved one's pestilential, and suckling babes drink up death instead of mother's milk"), and his desire to serve God, who has spoken to him. Led by Grez, Flagellants enter, whipping themselves. Urging Flote to join the Brotherhood of Pain "Let our penitential scourging take away God's pestilential wrath"), Grez hands him a club to beat himself. Jerking convulsively, Flote hits Grez by mistake. As he continues to do so inadvertently, the Flagellants laugh. Flote senses that their laughter is a sign from God, who wants him to humiliate himself as a clown in order to give people pleasure in their time of misery ("God wants peacocks not ravens, bright stars not sad comets, red noses not black death"). As symbol of his calling, he dons a clown's false red nose. (Soliloquy, Flagellants, and decision are in the Prologue to *Red Noses, Black Death*.) Flote attends the plague victims, sings "Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries," and cracks jokes to these unfortunates, who laugh before they expire happily (after he asks, "Is it true lawyers believe all men innocent till proved penniless?" for example, a plague victim "*lets out a thin, whinnying laugh and dies*"). Enter the Black Ravens, Scarron and Druce, a former galley slave and serf, now corpse-bearers who loot and squeeze plague pus from the dead so that they may grease, thereby kill, the wealthy, against whom they would lead the masses in revolution. As they go about their work, Flote recruits the mute Sonnerie (Bells) to his cause and gives him a red nose.

The two Red Noses travel to see Archbishop Monselet and Father Toulon. Flote tries to persuade Archbishop Monselet to bless his order as clowns for Christ, who would comfort the dying in their last moments on earth. Believing that laughter is odious to God, Father Toulon argues against this course of action, but Monselet perceives the usefulness of the Red Noses to the Church. His agreement is provisional, contingent upon the Pope's formal confirmation. Monselet commands Toulon to remain with Flote. (In *Red Noses, Black Death*, before permitting Toulon to join the Noses, Flote insists he prove his ability to perform as a fool. His sole performance skill, whistling "Colonel Bogey's March" from *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, gains him acceptance.)

Brodin, Rochfort, and Mistral—three marauding soldiers—chase

the nun Marguerite. Challenging Mistral's leadership, which makes him eligible to rape her first, Brodin kills him. Before he can exercise his pride of place, however, the Red Noses arrive to stop the rape by disconcerting him ("If you attack that Bride of Christ, I'll make uncouth noises with my mouth. The church can't stop you sinning but it can stop you enjoying it")—to the nun's disappointment ("I'm supposed to be raped! . . . Five years of prayers . . . and I can't even get raped. . . . The violation of my body's but another penance"). Flote recruits the trio to his order: Brodin can draw, Rochfort play the flute, Marguerite sing, and all three juggle.

I,ii: Deciding to spend their lives in debauchery ("Pleasure's the best plague cure, voluptuousness and excess will prolong our lives"), the hitherto frugal and sober LeFranc and Pellico, the only surviving Goldmerchants, shower gold on the whores Marie and Camille, who announce the new, higher fees of their union, the Whore's Guild. As they prepare for an orgy, the Noses arrive, seeking permission to perform in the town square, which Grez and his Flagellants also want to use for recruiting purposes. The Goldmerchants favor the Noses.

I,iii: Marguerite gives her heart to Bells.

I,iv: The Red Noses audition recruits: LeGrue, a blind juggler; Frapper, a stand-up comedian who stutters; and the Boutros Brothers, each with one leg and a cane, who sing and dance. To the vinegary Toulon, these performers exemplify Satanic pride, but Flote finds in them "the very apotheosis of Christianity: the triumph of hope over experience." Pope Clement VI sends for Flote at the papal court in Avignon. Flote decides that the entire band of Red Noses should go together—including the new recruits. (At the end of the equivalent scene in *Red Noses, Black Death*, only the priests, Flote and Toulon, leave.)

I,v: On their nocturnal journey, the blind LeGrue leads the troupe until he falls into a stream (a new scene; in *Red Noses, Black Death*, Flote's and Toulon's travels are marked by a map projected upstage and fear breeds roaring monsters whom the laughter of the two Red Noses destroys). The troupe passes a man who stands absolutely still, refusing to move a muscle lest he attract the plague. They meet Bigod, a man dressed, bewigged, and painted like a woman (in *Red Noses, Black Death*, an Executioner pursues Bigod, who spins on the ground, then dons a woman's wig and costume so that he may, as he puts it before the Executioner kills him, die like a man; as the Executioner prepares to do the same to Flote and Toulon, Flote prattles nonsensically about *Lame Wufnicks*, thereby disorienting him; theatrically, Flote's clawing the air

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causes the Executioner to twitch, limp, and gasp, and thus permits the Noses to escape and reach Avignon). The troupe of Red Noses meets a family of corpse carters (transplanted from an earlier scene with the Black Ravens in *Red Noses, Black Death*), who tell them where they are and direct them to their destination.

I,vi: A Herald announces them to the Pope, whom they see reflected in a magnifying mirror that permits him to hold audiences but avoid contact with possible plague carriers. They kiss the image of his ring. After dismissing all but the two priests (in *Red Noses, Black Death*, only Flote and Toulon meet him), he ensures that Flote obey papal commands no matter what they be. The Pope then blesses the Red Noses so that by diverting the populace the order will "take what's left of their minds off the harsh facts of existence."

I,vii: As the Noses prepare their performance of *Everyman*, the audience enters: corpse carters, Ravens, Flagellants, and whores accompanied by Goldmerchants (in *Red Noses, Black Death*, the last group does not attend). With a barrage of gags (Everyman's wife complains, "You promised me riches and everything that goes with it and all I got was everything that goes with it"; Death agrees to Everyman's request to bring a friend with him, "If you can find someone stupid enough"), the Noses' *Everyman* proves as diversionary as the Pope had hoped. During the performance, a member of the audience laughs and dies. After it, the Noses spin around, fall, then leave in the direction they face in order to spread their message. (After the performance in *Red Noses, Black Death*, but not in *Red Noses*, Bells dies of the plague; in the former, the spinning, falling, and departure occur in the first scene of Act II.)

II,i: Reuniting after their dispersal, the Noses recount their successes. (In *Red Noses, Black Death*, Marguerite, on her knees before Bells's costume, laments his death; the other Noses appear, don their false noses, and console her by singing "Red Noses for a Blue Lady.") Enter lepers, who are impervious to the troupe's jokes, since their despair is too deep. Flote dances with a female leper, whom he kisses. A crowd, seeking scapegoats for poisoned wells, kills the lepers. When the blind LeGrue threatens to juggle knives, it disperses. Because the poor, as the corpse carters demonstrate, prefer the comic shows of the Noses to the blandishments of the Flagellants and Ravens, these groups join to destroy their rivals.

II,ii: Relaxing after their labors, the Noses—except for the Boutros Brothers, who are visiting their wives—picnic. Members of the company tell jokes ("How shall I sing [this song]?" "Under an assumed name").

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Ringling the bells on his costume, Sonnerie tells a story. Using a hand puppet as surrogate, Frapper suddenly and surprisingly speaks fluently ("The seething sea ceaseth seething"). Ravens and Flagellants enter to kill them, but when Brodin and Rochfort draw their swords to do battle, Flote persuades everyone to let God, not violence, decide. Each group makes a sound appropriate to its order ("Caw-caw-caw," "Ahhh-ahhh-ahhh," "Haaa-haaa-haaa"), then recites a short speech in its order's behalf. Heaven is silent, but when Flote pleads for a sign, the one-legged Boutros Brothers arrive to announce the end of the plague. Flote believes that this is the sign they had requested from God and perceives that all three groups should unite in a brotherhood of social revolution, religious zeal, and joyous laughter. Spontaneously, the three groups shout, hug each other, dance, and sing "Join together, that's the plan. It's the secret. Man helps man." While they sing, Bells dies of the plague—the victim, as Rochfort puts it, of the last arrow that is always fired after the war's end. (In the contest in *Red Noses*, *Black Death*, each group unfolds its banner: a black raven against a red background; a crucified Christ; and St. Genesius, patron saint of actors, with an angel. Each releases a balloon with his order's colors: black, red, and bright blue. Godlike booing from above interrupts Scarron's and Grez's speeches. At the end of Flote's, which calls for unity among all three, the leaders join hands as—in heavenly signal—their three colored balloons, tied together, descend to the sound of applause from above.)

Realizing that the world has reverted to brutal normality, Rochfort prepares to leave the Red Noses. He invites Marguerite to join him. She agrees to do so after the *Nativity* play, which they had promised Flote to perform. He decides not to wait for her. He tries to persuade Brodin to accompany him, but when Brodin confesses he has lost his taste for killing, Rochfort stabs him and leaves. The other Noses return to rehearse the *Nativity*. While rehearsing, Brodin dies. (In *Red Noses*, *Black Death*, the scenes concerning Marguerite, Rochfort, Brodin, and the rehearsal occur immediately before the *Nativity* performance.)

II,iii: The Pope's mirror cracks. As Clement VI greets Monselet, they prepare to reestablish the power of the Church, restoring submission and belief as "the twin poles of the world." The Pope issues a Bull Condemning the Flagellants ("What's to become of the most profitable function of the Holy Office—selling salvation . . .? If [people are] getting it free from the Flagellants we'll be forced out of the salvation business") and supports the secular authority's campaign to crush the insurrectionary Ravens (in *Red Noses*, *Black Death*, he does only the former). Although Monselet counsels condemnation of the

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Noses as well, Clement believes that since a revolution that has missed its chance will not return, the Noses present no threat to authority.

II,iv: Returning to their powerful secular positions, Goldmerchants LeFranc and Pellico bind Camille and Marie as wives—completing what the Pope in the previous scene called “the three-fold chains of State, Church, and Marriage.” The Goldmerchants order Scarron and Druce killed for murdering the rich in time of plague. The Red Noses try to save them by doing a comic turn as lawyers (“No case too small, no fee too large”). Although Flote argues that they were not really revolutionists, only advocates of moderate progress through legal means, Scarron rejects this defense, preferring to die instead. Scarron and Druce are hanged. Enter the Flagellants, chained. Before they are burned, Grez recognizes that they should have tried to eliminate pain, not embrace it (“Now he tells us!” exclaims one of his followers).

The Red Noses perform *The Nativity*, whose humor, different from that of *Everyman*, is revolutionary. The Pope, who arrives with Monselet and Rochfort, orders Flote to please the populace with meringues rather than meat. The performance continues, but, as the audience recognizes, jokes that subvert secular and religious authority are not funny. Flote agrees that previously his humor was a way of evading the truth and responsibility, diverting attention from real evil until the mighty returned. Discarding their false red noses, the entire troupe elects to die rather than submit to authority. The Pope has them killed.

Epilogue: As a spotlight illuminates the discarded red noses, their voices are heard. Preparing to meet God, Whom the Noses intend to question about the world He created, they affirm their revolutionary solidarity in song.

The complexity of *Red Noses, Black Death* is balanced by its formal design. A Prologue and Epilogue frame its two acts. Developing comic success upon comic success, Act I culminates in triumph, mitigated by the death of Bells; developing partly comic danger upon decreasingly comic danger, Act II culminates in failure. At the end of each act, the Red Noses perform a comedy, but as indicated by the response of the onstage audience (which, according to theatrical convention, aims to prompt the response of the audience in the auditorium), the comedies differ from each other: the first onstage spectators, except for Scarron, laugh at soothing humor; the second fail to laugh at subversive humor. Despite such differences, death concludes each act: in the first, that of an individual member of the company, caused by the plague; in the second, that of the entire company, caused by authority. The Prologue

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begins with Flote seated upon the edge of a grave, meditating upon death and God; the Epilogue focuses upon the troupe of Red Noses as, recollecting a graveyard world, they prepare to meet God. Soothing laughter is born at the end of the Prologue; revolutionary laughter is reaffirmed at the end of the Epilogue. In the Prologue, Flote determines to make laughter help people bear their lot; in the Epilogue, change their lot.

The first, most obvious difference between the plays is the title. In an interview, Terry Hands, who directed the play's original production, explains why he persuaded the author to change *Red Noses*, *Black Death* to *Red Noses*: "I said to Peter that I was worried about that title, that it was going to put people off."⁹ While critics, academic or otherwise, may find it easy to cast stones for pandering to what he perceives to be the inclinations of middle-class spectators, the practical problem is that an unpopulated auditorium means an unreached audience. If a change of title will attract people who might otherwise stay away, such a change, which is relatively minor, seems legitimate. Furthermore, the production of so unusual a work as *Red Noses* evidences not a director's timorousness but his daring. As Hands accurately says in another interview, "I'm risking emptying that auditorium . . . and the only reason I can risk that is because we've had a marvelously successful season of *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, *Richard III*."¹⁰

Red Noses has a different design from *Red Noses*, *Black Death*. Act I traces a series of Flote's triumphs, which the death of Bells does not mar. Beginning with the slaughter of the lepers, Act II traces a series of disasters—whose inexorable progression is momentarily interrupted and seemingly halted by the union of Ravens, Flagellants, and Noses—leading to the sequential massacre of all three. The Epilogue recapitulates both problem and solution.

Many details improve *Red Noses*. For example, Barnes has Bigod explain why he dresses as a woman: because of the superstition that twice as many men as women die of the plague, he thinks that wearing women's clothing would double his chances of survival. After the plague has ended, the Pope acts against both perceived threats to authority, the Black Ravens as well as the Flagellants. In addition to representing the aristocracy among the different social classes recruited into the Red Noses, Rochfort emerges as a shrewd practitioner of *Realpolitik*: upon the very announcement that the plague is over, he perceives that with the imminent return of secular and religious powers he should revert to his former ways, whereas in *Red Noses*, *Black Death*, the murder of the

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Ravens and Flagellants, which occurs later in the action, spurs his recognition.

Barnes's blue-pencil tightens many passages, notably Flote's opening speech, from which it deletes redundancies as well as such irrelevancies as France's war with England stopping long enough to allow people to die of the Black Death. On the other hand (and, since neither drama nor criticism is mathematical, there is frequently another hand) the author also eliminates such striking statements as "Men can't live in this misery, die in this despair." In addition, the removal of Toulon's whistling results in his becoming the only member of the Red Noses without a unique talent.

Despite the symmetry that Prologue and Epilogue give *Red Noses*, *Black Death*, the portrayal of plague victims before Flote's soliloquy provides a more dynamic opening to *Red Noses* than Flote's expository speech does to *Red Noses*, *Black Death*, and Dr. Antrechau's speeches are more appropriate among the plague victims, who are presumably his patients (*Red Noses*), than they are among the corpse carters (*Red Noses*, *Black Death*). On the other hand, after Antrechau's preposterous account of the plague's origins and his consistent record of failure, audiences may respond to Flote's accurate account of the Black Death's origins and toll as skeptically as they did to Antrechau's.

Many sequences in *Red Noses*, *Black Death* are more theatrical than their counterparts in *Red Noses*. For example, the killing of Mistral: "BRODIN grasps the handle of his sword and MISTRAL's wine flagon shatters. Red wine pours out. He looks down in astonishment. I'm stained. You was too quick." By contrast (*Red Noses*): "As MISTRAL starts to unsheath his sword, BRODIN whips out his dagger and stabs him in the stomach." Mistral utters the same sentences, which no longer resonate with comic irony. On the other hand, the view of the Pope's magnifying mirror cracking (*Red Noses*) is more theatrically effective than the view after it has cracked (*Red Noses*, *Black Death*). In the contest among Ravens, Flagellants, and Noses, the banners, balloons, and response from God (*Red Noses*, *Black Death*) are more vivid than the contest without them (*Red Noses*); furthermore, their union is a more thematically appropriate sign of God's blessing than the news that the plague has ended.

Barnes radically changes the journey to Avignon. In *Red Noses*, the entire troupe goes, not just Flote and Toulon. Gone are the maps that trace the trip, the roaring beasts who disappear when Flote and Toulon laugh, the Executioner's theatricalized murder (he slashes the air with his axe, whereupon Bigod falls dead), and Flote's vivid escape (the *Lame Wufnicks*). In their place are the comic leadership of blind

LeGrue, the structural integration of the corpse carters with the Noses, and the demonstration of the Pope's powers, which extend beyond his sequestered court (although he has not previously met the members of the Noses, he knows, apparently because spies have told him, who they are).

Nevertheless, in expanding the role of LeGrue, *Red Noses* makes too much of a good thing. His theater-related activities with the Noses, whether juggling or helping the audience to their seats (fumblingly feeling a whore's breast as he does so) are hilarious; by contrast, his antics on the journey expand his role past the point of diminishing returns, thereby weakening the comic impact of his subsequent scenes with the Noses. In addition, since the Pope dismisses all of the Noses except Flote and Toulon (originally, the only members of the troupe who travel to his court) immediately after meeting them, their introduction is so obviously superfluous that it reveals the journey itself to be essentially dead time, whose deletion would deprive audiences of nothing essential to the play. All that is necessary would be a statement that Flote and Toulon are going to leave, followed by their arrival in Avignon.

Red Noses contains new comic anachronisms that are typically Barnesonian references to twentieth-century popular culture, such as the blind LeGrue's admonition to his helper when they are in the presence of the Pope, "Give him the teeth, Bembo, and the whole personality"—which is Tony Curtis' advice to Jack Lemmon, while both masquerade as women, when Joe E. Brown flirts with Lemmon in the film *Some Like It Hot*. On the other hand, *Red Noses* deletes many comic anachronisms from *Red Noses*, *Black Death*, most notably perhaps the troupe's effort to lighten Marguerite's spirits after Bells's death:

Lights fade up to show FLOTE, TOULON, ROCHFORT, and BRODIN entering Stage Right, putting on their false, red noses and singing softly [to the tune of "Red Roses for a Blue Lady"]:

Here are some red noses for a blue lady. / Sister Marguerite take our present please. / (*They produce bouquets of flowers from their sleeves.*) You had the saddest parting the other day. / Hope our lovely roses chase your blues away. / . . . We put on red noses for a blue lady. / Wear them for the bravest girl around. / We all here made a bet / We'd help that girl forget / That dear sweet dead man five feet underground.

Eliminated too is Archbishop Monselet's reference to the Lone Ranger ("Hi-Ho Silver and away") before he flees to the plague-free mountains.

Red Noses also deletes typically Barnesonian literary and cultural

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allusions, such as one of the whore's statements, when after the plague she and her colleague marry the Goldmerchants, "We've dwindled to wives"—a reference to the contract scene in Congreve's *The Way of the World*, a suggestion that this servile relationship rather than their commanding status during the plague—what they supplied decreased while demand for it increased—is the true way of the world. On the other hand, *Red Noses* retains many of them, including Rochfort's promise that he will carve out an empire for Marguerite (from *Ivanhoe*) and LeGrue's outcry during the Noses' picnic, before anyone has seen the Ravens and Flagellants, "I spy strangers"—a term used in the House of Commons to clear the gallery of visitors.

Four significant cuts from *Red Noses*, *Black Death* diminish the impact of *Red Noses*. Dropped in revision is an early thematic statement that places the sufferings caused by the Black Death in the perspective of sufferings inflicted on the lower classes by the authorities. Scarron tells Flote:

Ten percent of the population of Auxerre dies of starvation every year without plague help. . . . War tax, land tax, salt tax, we grind our corn at the master's mill, bake our bread in the master's oven. Free men're made bondsmen, dress in tatters, whilst our fields're enclosed and stolen by landlords.

When Flote asks Grez what he would wish to be if he were not Master of Flagellants, Grez replies, "Pope. A true Vicar of Christ who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and helped the oppressed"—which unlike any passage in *Red Noses* reveals his authentically Christian benevolence and generates sympathy for him. Gone from Archbishop Monselet's first scene is his complaint about the Black Death's effect upon the Church's power, "Men've seen death treat all men equal. Authority's gone, no place for Christ." *Red Noses* is less blasphemous, therefore less subversive than *Red Noses*, *Black Death*, as in a deleted passage wherein Flote juggles three colored balls and tells Marguerite, Brodin, and Rochfort (here and elsewhere, brackets indicate deletions):

FLOTE: . . . These balls are God, *ally-ooop*. (*Without breaking rhythm he passes the balls to MARGUERITE, who continues juggling*).
Feel Him, *ally-ooop ally-ooop*.

MARGUERITE: [His balls. His balls. I feel 'em. I feel 'em.]

In place of her expunged speech, she says, "I feel Him!"

With the elimination of these and similar passages, one can conclude that the work's revolutionary impact diminishes. On the other hand, one can also conclude that its incendiary themes, subversive of

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secular and religious authority, still inhere in the play but do not court the danger of bludgeoning the audience.

During the RSC's rehearsals of *Red Noses*, Barnes authored or authorized many changes that refined the play or adjusted it to increase its effectiveness, particularly in regard to the abilities and sensibilities of the director and cast. When, for instance, Rochfort's statement upon meeting the Pope, "My father is so mean he never breathes out," seemed to be insufficiently funny, Barnes changed it to "Holy father, my father—unlike you, father—is so mean he never breathes out." As mentioned earlier, the transformation of *Red Noses*, *Black Death* to *Red Noses* included the excision of Toulon's audition for the Red Noses by whistling. This created a problem for Anthony Sher (who played Flote) in the scene after Monselet orders Toulon to become a Red Nose, for as the actor legitimately conceived the role, Flote would find it hard to refuse anyone. In *Red Noses*, I, i, the sequence reads:

FLOTE: Before you can join Christ's Clowns, Father, you must prove of use.

TOULON: Use? A man of my moral inflexibility would be welcomed with open arms in any religious community.

FLOTE: First we must ask, can you play a tune on your head like Sasha Gelen, "the man with the musical skull," or by rubbing your knees together like Perri Rouve, the Human Grasshopper? Can you play the hubble-bubble buffoon, the capering roach and simkin? Can you make them roar with a quip that brings the roses back their elbows?

TOULON: Insolent priest, I only smiled once in my life and then my face slipped. No, I can't play a tune on my head, rub my knees together, caper or quip.

FLOTE: Then you can't be a Red Nose.

TOULON: But I can't not be. I have my orders, eyes front, quick march.

(SONNERIE *shakes his body excitedly.*)

FLOTE: That's right, sweet Sonn. We can teach you, so Christ can use you, Father Toulon.

To enhance the character that Sher was in the process of creating, Barnes trimmed some passages, then rearranged and changed others, so that after the same first two speeches, the sequence in performance became:

FLOTE: First we must ask, can you play a tune on your head like Sasha Gelen, "the man with the musical skull," or by rubbing your knees together like Perri Rouve, the Human Grasshopper?

TOULON (*relieved*): So I can't be a Red Nose.

FLOTE (*morally torn*): But you can't not be.

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(*SONNERIE shakes his body excitedly.*)

FLOTE: We can teach you! Then Christ can use you, Father Toulon.

During rehearsals, the director and actors aimed to distinguish the two Black Ravens, Scarron and Druce, from each other. To help achieve this goal, Hands suggested assigning Scarron's quips to Druce, so that the latter would be the one with a sense of humor, the former the unsmiling revolutionary. In II,i, for instance, the Ravens and Flagellants decide to join to destroy the Noses:

GREZ: . . . I confess, I've always had a soft spot for Father Flote.

SCARRON: A peat bog in the northern Ardennes. I say we grease the Noses dead.

GREZ: We're pledged to commit no violence. I must try and persuade him to join our Brotherhood of Whip and Cudgel.

SCARRON: The way he flogs old jokes it should be easy.

GREZ: But if he doesn't see the light?

SCARRON: We snuff it out.

Although Barnes recognized the validity of such a transfer, he explained that he gave the two gags to Scarron in order to prevent audiences from perceiving him as totally evil, since Scarron is justified. He paraphrased the film director Jean Renoir, that everyone has his reasons, and he agreed to the switch of lines provided the actor make every effort to convince the audience that Scarron's goal is legitimate—to which the actor and the director agreed. Thus, in performance, the exchange became (the deletions indicated by brackets were made in subsequent rehearsals):

GREZ: . . . I confess, I've always had a soft spot for Father Flote.

DRUCE: A peat bog in the northern Ardennes.

SCARRON: I say we grease the Noses dead.

GREZ: We're pledged to commit no violence. [I must try and persuade him to join our Brotherhood of Whip and Cudgel.

DRUCE: The way he flogs old jokes it should be easy.]

The next two speeches remained intact.

If *Red Noses* were performed uncut, it would probably last almost four hours, including intermission, which as Barnes recognized from the outset would be too long. For this reason, he agreed to almost every cut requested by the director, Terry Hands, while the RSC rehearsed the play. As he explained to me during a rehearsal break, he did not want panic to set in at dress rehearsal when everyone in the company discovers that the play is half an hour too long. In the event, the RSC

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production of *Red Noses* lasted slightly more than three hours, including intermission—perhaps the maximum duration that audiences nowadays are willing to accept for a play not written by Shakespeare.

Unfortunately, the excisions requested by Terry Hands, to which Barnes agreed, seriously damaged the play's themes and techniques to the point that they defanged *Red Noses*, thereby making the production a relatively harmless entertainment. As Martin Esslin states, "the intellectual power and insight of the play have been impaired."¹¹ Calling the RSC's production of *Red Noses* "cosy," Irving Wardle observes that Hands's production "goes a long way to disinfecting the material."¹² Small wonder, therefore, that reviewers unfamiliar with either *Red Noses*, *Black Death* or *Red Noses* draw such conclusions as: its "message [is] that laughter is the best medicine"¹³; "its moral power never transcends the level of flower power philosophy"¹⁴; and "The governing idea is that when customary conventions and hierarchies are suspended during a period of catastrophe, innocence and good fellowship can flourish. Few would dispute that it is more pleasant to dance, sing, crack jokes and share out your supper than to cut your neighbour's throat."¹⁵ In the end, the RSC's *Red Noses* became a play not about revolution but about good people trying to help unfortunates.

Among the major cuts are important thematic statements by Scarron, leader of the Black Ravens, for example, "[We grease for a higher purpose, to wipe the slate clean, turn the world underside up, crack the Universe.] We grease because we hate" (I,i) and the speech "Remember the oppressed are legion. And when all the holes in their belts are used up, we'll destroy the soft hands, fat bellies and take their fine places" (I,vii). Gone as well is his objection to the soothing comedy of *Everyman*: "They haven't shown the world as it is or how we can change it" (I,vii). Exit Flote's explicit recognition, "Master Scarron, Master Grez, we three are in the Millennium business and it's a waste to fight amongst ourselves. All forms of rebellion must come together" (II,ii). In Terry Hands's production, Flote does not argue that the Ravens "merely advocated forming a moderate Party of Slow, Lawful, Orthodox Progress—S.L.O.P." and therefore Scarron does not declare, "rather the Milky Way round my throat, eternity in my ears, than SLOP" (II, iv). Much of the subversive humor of the *Nativity* disappears (II,iv), such as an announcement ("In a stable the infant Jesus chose to lie. Amongst the poor who never die. They've never lived so how can they die?"), a speech by one of the three kings ("Only remember in Thy coming years of triumph, kings paid you tribute. We bend knee to you so your followers will bend knee to us after)," and an observation after

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the slaughter of the innocents ("If you had lived you would have learned to love your rulers for the way their softest whisper is obeyed like a shouted command. But you only lived long enough to feel their sharp swords").

The alterations of *Red Noses* in its transformation from page to stage involve more than dialogue that is thematically consequential. Hands's staging botches a number of potentially effective sequences. Because he believed, as he stated at rehearsal, that Barnes's notion of a magnifying mirror for the Pope's antechamber (I,vi; II,iii) is a movie idea, impractical for the stage (which might mean that it was impractical for Farrah's setting, which he accepted, or that he encouraged the designer to create a setting in which the mirror could not function), he or Farrah devised an alternative: as the Pope would rise on an elevator, a transparent cone would descend from the flies to cover him; unfortunately, since the lift proved impractical, the actor merely walked onstage, as Benedict Nightingale noted, to "cocoon himself in what . . . looks like a huge condom."¹⁶ Instead of one of the Goldmerchants pouring gold from his codpiece (I,ii), he poured it from a sack. In II,i, a leper removes bandages from her head to reveal a rusty metal frame shaped like a face; Hands stated at rehearsal, "I think it would have more of a shock if she had a real face"—which she did, but the sight was not shocking.

In performance, the comedy in the opening section of the first scene vanished, including the statement by the plague victim who sniffs scent boxes to cure himself, "Monday: wormwood, rosemary, marjoram. Tuesday: valerian, alant, juniper. Wednesday: red-fern, milfoil, lavender. They cure the plague if you sniff. [I know, I've spent money.]" and as Dr. Antrechau was dropped (after the program containing his name was printed), so was his litany:

I prescribe wine and they die, no wine and they die, exercise and they die, abstinence and they die, debauchery and they die, cold meat and they die, hot meat and they die, no meat and they die, sleep on the right side and they die, left side, ditto. I've a hundred per cent record of failure.

The result, particularly with lighting that created a bleak atmosphere, is that many members of the audience did not immediately respond to the comedy in the early part of the play.

The RSC production also tamed a great deal of Barnes's distinctive theatricality. In the first scene of *Red Noses*, Flote sings "Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries" to plague victims—an outrageously hilarious anachronism; at the Barbican, he sang "Sit among the Lilies," a sweetly

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nonsensical ditty he also sang during the trip to Avignon. A number of Barnes's nonverbal but meaningful sounds vanished, including the entire speech in which Camille tries to stimulate the Goldmerchants sexually (I,ii):

Stags and stallions empty it in one short thunderclap, goats and buck rabbits six times hourly, leeches do it to themselves and elephants can bugger an ant given enough time and patience. Pigs grunt, *grrr grrr*, vultures groan inside dead carcasses, *urrr urrr*, frogs twenty days at a time, *huhh huhh*. *Grrr grrr*, *urrr urrr*, *huhh huhh*.

Hands is less fond than Barnes of calling attention to the theater as theater. Consequently, he deleted the theatrically crucial portion of the sole speech of Archbishop Monselet's First Attendant (I,i):

Hoo-hooo-ooooh (He pours the bowl of vinegar over his head and shrieks.) I've got the boils, the black buboes! I'm stricken. (The others shrink back.) Mother of God, I'm not ready. I've only just been born and now I have to die. [All the fault of writers—cock-pimping scribblers. They've prepared the way. Always writing stories where some characters are important and others just disposable stock—First Attendant, Second Peasant, Third Guard. Stories're easier when 't isn't possible to care for everyone equal. That's how itty-bitty-bit people like me come to be butchered on battlefields, die in droves on a *hoo-ooo-ooooh*. But we First Attendants are important too. We've lives.] I've lodged in the chaffinch, lived in the flower, seen the sun coming up. I've discovered unbelievable things. I'm an extraordinary person. I'll tell you a secret.

(He dies.)

Five months after the first press night of *Red Noses*, the American dramatist Terrence McNally pointed out, in relation to his own experiences in the theater, that a director might "insist on structural changes [he is] positive will make all the difference to the play's success"; McNally immediately and accurately added, "If it's a good director, I'd be a fool not to listen."¹⁷ But he also struck a warning note: "A play is lost . . . when the original impetus behind its writing is misplaced or forgotten during its metamorphosis from typescript to that living organism we call a play."¹⁸ Both of McNally's comments are relevant to the transformation of *Red Noses* from the page to the RSC's stage. Despite the changes in and deletions from *Red Noses*, possibly or perhaps probably because of them, Hands's production proved to be a popular and critical success for the RSC. Throughout its run, houses sold out; as mentioned earlier, it won the Laurence Olivier Award as

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Best Drama of 1985. Most critics agree with Michael Coveney, "The reestablishment of Peter Barnes as one of our major dramatists has been long overdue."¹⁹ Michael Billington calls *Red Noses*

a brilliant play. It also does something rare in modern drama: it presents us, unsentimentally, with a vision of love and hope. . . . Barnes has written a tremendous life-affirming piece that celebrates the human spirit while deriding those who would tyrannize and encase it. . . . I can think of no postwar play that demonstrates so vividly that Socialism (which is what the Flotties partially represent) should be a source of gaiety; and few that put on stage so tangible a vision of happiness.

He concludes that "the triumph belongs to Barnes, who has broken the petty rules by which we judge plays."²⁰ Irving Wardle, quoted above for his adverse criticism of Hands's production, declares in the same review that none of his reservations "diminishes [the play's] claim as a heroic act on the frontiers of comedy, and a work that draws volcanic gales of laughter from the act of transgression." Martin Esslin, whose dissatisfactions with the RSC's production mirror many of my own, begins the final paragraph of his review with a series of questions:

Should we be thankful for small mercies and rejoice that a tremendous play by one of the most important playwrights of our time, one who has been most scurvily treated, has at last been given a performance and can be seen and admired? Or should we regret the fact that the performance this outstanding play has received does less than justice to its merits, its depth of insight, its brilliance of design? . . . Does an imperfect production do more harm than good to a major but undervalued playwright? True worth always rises to the surface in the end—but how long does that take?

In answer, he decides that flawed productions are probably better than none if they send the more thoughtful spectators to the text and engender other, more faithful productions—which he hopes will be the case with *Red Noses*.

Esslin's questions are valid, as are his answers. However, other possible responses, which complement rather than conflict with his, revolve around authorial ownership and theatrical practice. As supervising playwright, Barnes himself either authorized or authored all of the changes that resulted in Hands's production of *Red Noses*, which is therefore as much his play as the published version of *Red Noses* or the typescript titled *Red Noses, Black Death*. The director neutralized much of Barnes's distinctive theatrical idiom, but he also retained Barnesonian techniques (the one-legged Boutros Brothers, for exam-

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ple, still dance with crutches as they sing "When You're Smiling"; Rochfort still declares, "None but the brave desert the fair," which parodies Dryden's "None but the brave deserve the fair"; and Toulon still utters meaningful nonverbal sounds to distinguish God's "haaaa-haaa" from fools' "heee-heee-heee").

Certainly, reviewers perceived no stylistic authorial shift when they reviewed the RSC production. Whatever its deficiencies may be, the RSC production made *Red Noses* accessible to both playgoers and play-readers. Today, publishers rarely print unproduced contemporary drama, and English publishers usually attempt to make the date of publication coincide with that of the first production. Were it not for the RSC production, *Red Noses* would not exist as a printed work. Thus, other productions, including those that Esslin and I hope will be more faithful to *Red Noses*, are now possible, which probably would not have been the case otherwise. In fact, the Olivier Award enhances such possibilities.

¹ Facsimiles in C. F. Tucker Brooke and Nathaniel Burton Paradise, *English Drama 1580-1642* (Boston: Heath, 1933), pp. 435, 361, 645.

² E.g., Albert Camus, *The Possessed* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1960), an adaptation of the novel by Feodor Dostoyevsky. See p. 7.

³ Tom Stoppard, "Real Books, Real Authors," *The Author*, 95 (Summer 1984), 61.

⁴ He wrote his first screenplay (*Violent Moment*) in 1958, his first play (*The Time of the Barracudas*) in 1963. See Bernard F. Dukore, *The Theatre of Peter Barnes* (London: Heinemann, 1981), Chapter 2, for this and similar information.

⁵ Dukore, *The Theatre of Peter Barnes*, p. 38.

⁶ Peter Barnes, *Red Noses* (London: Faber, 1985). Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are from this edition.

⁷ The RSC program (Barbican Theatre, London) lists the first performance as 27 June. This was the first public preview. Like the other previews, it was to have been a full-dress rehearsal before an audience (actually, spectators did not see the Epilogue until press night). The first preview performance did not take place in its entirety. Unaccustomed to the elevator, with which the cast had not adequately rehearsed until then, Jim Hooper (Bells) inadvertently placed his foot in the space between it and the stage floor, resulting in an accident during the performance, which caused cancellation of this preview. On the next night, and in most previews thereafter, his understudy, Cathy Tyson, replaced him. Since the RSC rehearsals, which I attended, are not the subject of this essay, I refer to them only when they are pertinent.

⁸ Dukore, *The Theatre of Peter Barnes*, Chapter 4 et seq.

⁹ Terry Hands, "Red Noses at the Barbican," *Plays International*, 1 (Aug. 1985), 14.

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¹⁰ Terry Hands, "You take a classic and hack it apart and then you put it together again," *Guardian*, 3 July 1985, p. 9.

¹¹ Martin Esslin, "London Notices," *Plays International*, 1 (Aug. 1985), 28.

¹² Irving Wardle, "Black humour of tour around the plague pits," *Times*, 3 July 1985, p. 10.

¹³ Clive Hirschhorn, *Sunday Express*, 7 July 1985, rpt. *London Theatre Record*, 5 (1985), 616.

¹⁴ Sheila Fox, *City Limits*, 12 July 1985, rpt. *London Theatre Record*, p. 618.

¹⁵ Christopher Edwards, *Spectator*, 13 July 1985, rpt. *London Theatre Record*, p. 619.

¹⁶ Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, 12 July 1985, rpt. *London Theatre Record*, p. 619.

¹⁷ Terrence McNally, "From Page to Stage: How a Playwright Guards His Vision," *New York Times*, 7 Dec. 1986, Section II, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁹ Michael Coveney, "Red Noses/Barbican," *Financial Times*, 3 July 1985, p. 13.

²⁰ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 4 July 1985, rpt. *London Theatre Record*, p. 615.

“Venus Metempsychosis” and *Venus in Furs*: Masochism and Fertility in *Ulysses*

CAROL SIEGEL

The many and innovative styles James Joyce uses in *Ulysses* are complemented by innovative choices of subject matter. Joyce seems to have been determined to defy the literary conventions of his time not only by going into the most private recesses of the body to reveal common processes, such as menstruation and defecation, but also by emphasizing his protagonist Leopold Bloom's sexual differences from what is generally regarded as the norm. Joyce's descriptions of sexual fantasies and bodily functions succeeded in disgusting critics as diverse as D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. As Richard Brown has shown, the first critics of *Ulysses* recognized little difference between Joyce's interest in the things we must do because we have (gendered) bodies and the things we wish to do to express our sexual feelings.¹ Postmodern novels frequently feature bizarre sexual scenes and graphic descriptions of the body's processes, and recent criticism has had little to say about Joyce's inclusion of the latter in his vision of a day that embraces all of man's experience. However, Bloom's masochistic behavior and desires are another matter.

The publication of Joyce's letters and, in 1983, the dramatic appearance of a revised, “unexpurgated” version of Richard Ellmann's critical biography *James Joyce* have led many readers to think of Bloom's perverse sexual inclinations as nothing more than Joyce's own playfully delivered confessions. Critics, including both Brown and Ellmann, who believe that Joyce's intentions were more serious, stress literary rather than experiential sources for his descriptions of masochistic rituals. William York Tindall first made the influential observation that Joyce had read Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* and alluded to it in “Circe.”²

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Because so much of *Ulysses* is concerned with the struggle between creative and destructive drives, it may be convenient to think of Bloom's masochism simply as one of many obstacles that the fertility inherent in life encounters and to believe that Joyce used Sacher-Masoch's novel as his authority for the treatment of this minor theme. But, if procreation is to be considered a major theme of *Ulysses*, masochism must also, because Joyce's passionate interest in both shapes not just Bloom's character but the entire novel. Yet a consideration of the relationship of masochism to fertility in *Ulysses* logically begins with Bloom and his problems with his wife, Molly.

When Bloom tries to explain metempsychosis to Molly, he initially correctly defines it as reincarnation, but in his examples confuses it with metamorphosis.³ At the end of the day, in Molly's mind, it has been given both erotic and religious connotations—"that word meant something with hoses in it and he came out with some jawbreakers about the incarnation" (pp. 753-54). By then the word's true meaning hardly matters, because metempsychosis has been connected to the central problem of Bloom's day: whether or not he will be able to create a new version of himself in a new body. "Venus Metempsychosis," as the goddess who may preside over this miraculous enactment of the ordinary, is well entitled to her place in the new Bloomusalem beside those other representatives of Bloom's ability to see the divine in mundane forms of love, Venus Callipyge and Venus Pandemos. The Venuses that adorn Bloom's reformed dream-Dublin are all "naked goddesses"; Venus in furs does not appear among them, yet one might feel that she too deserves a place of honor, for she is invoked again and again throughout *Ulysses* (p. 490). Does the presence of the Venus of procreation preclude that of the Venus of masochism?

Most Joyce critics seem to believe it does. Tindall is typical in finding Bloom's role as "happy cuckold," "womanly man," and "masochistic pig" and his role as "husband and father" mutually exclusive (pp. 207-08). Stanley Sultan says that only by "subjugating" the women who would dominate him can Bloom return to "the full manhood of earlier years."⁴ In contrast Hugh Kenner argues that the masochistic rituals of "Circe" are necessary to Bloom because he has defied "the injunction laid on his people to be fruitful and multiply" and so "needs to undergo purgation by pity and terror."⁵ Brown agrees that Bloom's sexual degradation is necessary to the success of his journey back to Molly, but only because Bloom's masochistic experiences reinforce the "feministic recognition of female strength" which helps him overcome his potentially destructive jealousy.⁶ Instead of

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seeing Bloom's masochism as a force against procreation, Brown views fertility and masochism as approximately equal threats to Bloom's happiness and sees Bloom's "onanistic concept of sexuality" as the virtue which ultimately protects him from destruction in nighttown.⁷

However, Bloom and Molly seem more disturbed by their sexual relationship's irregularity than Brown acknowledges. Bloom himself seems to consider his ordeals in "Circe" punishments for his inability to "do a man's job" among other, perhaps equally grave, crimes (p. 541). To Molly, Bloom's masochism is just another one of the many "cracked ideas" of a "man tyrant as ever," who will never "let you enjoy anything naturally," one among a multitude of annoying and sterile perversions (pp. 777, 773, 171). But these views, like all of those which make up *Ulysses*, focus on incomplete aspects of the truth. Masochism, as it is revealed to us during the course of *Ulysses'* day, has multiple causes, results, and even forms, and only by considering them all can we glimpse the real relationship between Venus Metempsychosis and Venus in furs.

The presence of the latter goddess is the most obvious in "Circe," in which she is mentioned by name in Mrs. Bellingham's complaint—"He addressed me in several handwritings with fulsome compliments as a Venus in furs"—and implicitly in the contents of Bloom's hallucinations, which often parodically parallel the famous novel of the same name. Ellmann locates several points of similarity between Bloom's experiences in nighttown and Severin's with Wanda: each man wants to wear "his lady's livery" and act as an (abused) servant, each awakens her latent sadism, puts her shoe onto her foot and feels that foot on his neck, "attends . . . at her bath," agrees to be her slave, and ushers in her new lover.⁸

There are, however, some errors in Ellmann's description of correspondences that subsequent critics seem not to have deemed worth noting. Severin and Bloom do not both request and enjoy the "privilege" of "being birched."⁹ Nothing so relatively mild appeals to Severin, who is obsessed with martyrdom and whose mistress begins his torments with a whip "of the kind that are used in Russia for intractable slaves."¹⁰ Bloom prefers "the spanking idea. A warm tingling glow without effusion"; he is threatened with flogging that, because of the timely arrival of Davy Stephens, never occurs; he undergoes a calm and apparently sensationless martyrdom "amid phoenix flames"; and he receives from Bella/Bello, in addition to humiliating but physically painless indignities, a twist of the arm and a slap in the face (pp. 468, 469, 498, 533). He suffers no physical agonies comparable to those of

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Severin, who is beaten unconscious repeatedly throughout *Venus in Furs*. Even more misleading is Ellmann's suggestion that Wanda and Bella are equivalent characters. Severin's Venus is "still very young, twenty-four at most" (two years younger than he is), and seems extremely fragile with her "slight figure," "piquant" head, and "infinitely delicate" skin.¹¹ Ellmann also neglects to mention the most glaring difference between Severin's and Bloom's chastisements: Bloom is dressed, addressed, and offered to men as a woman, while Severin at his least conventionally manly moments is always identified as male.

Joyce's reinterpretation of *Venus in Furs*, encapsulated in "Circe," brings out subtexts not only of Masoch's novel but most of the pornography contemporary with it. In fact where *Venus in Furs* appears to differ from the pornographic norm "Circe" closely adheres to it. Steven Marcus, drawing upon a huge amount of Victorian "flagellation" literature identifies its basic form and the predominant themes.¹² He writes, "What goes on is always the same": a person, almost always male, "is accused of some wrong doing" by an "immense female figure" and a punishment follows, accompanied by a dialogue in which he begs for mercy and she threatens and lectures.¹³ The woman feels "unalloyed pleasure" and the man (or boy) "a mixture of pain and pleasure."¹⁴ "There is . . . an enormous amount of conscious acting or role playing throughout the literature," and "the differences between the sexes are blurred and confused."¹⁵ In Marcus' view these stories are informed by an infantile fear of attraction to the mother which is conflated with repressed homosexual longings.¹⁶

Such themes appear only at the beginning and end of Masoch's novel. Severin's attraction to his cruel aunt could be seen as a displaced oedipal passion, and his feeling that he could "now understand the masculine Eros" when he sees "the Greek" near the end of the novel is clear enough.¹⁷ "Circe," on the other hand, is packed with sexual mothers and blatant homosexuality from the moment when Bloom joins Stephen until both rush out. Zoe, urging Bloom to follow her up the stairs, is both whore and mother with "the hand that rocks the cradle" and at a touch reduces Bloom to his baby-self (pp. 500-01). Her allure becomes masculine as well as feminine when Bloom appreciatively notices rising from her skirts "the lion reek of all the male brutes that have possessed her" (p. 501). A moment later, motherly again, she cries out "Hoopsa!" as she catches him on the stairs, and so echoes the midwives in "Oxen of the Sun" (pp. 501, 383). Florry, the prostitute Bloom seems to find most appealing, also has a charm compounded of masculine and motherly elements, as she is "mammal in weight of

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bosom" and, according to Virag, probably the possessor of a "potent rectum" (p. 513). Again female promiscuity, maternity, and male homosexuality flow into each other as Bloom's musings on the attraction and repulsion between women, "the cloven sex," and serpents lead him to think of un milked cows who "seek out the saurian's lair in order to entrust their teats to his avid suction," and Virag responds "Who's Ger Ger? Who's dear Gerald?" (p. 516).

In the scene between Bloom and Bella the confusion of genders and roles reaches its apex. Despite "a baritone voice" and male attire Bello is more a "ma'amsir" than a man (pp. 530, 532). Bello, the "suckeress" threatens Bloom with phallic but femininely high heels, "glistening in their proud erectness" and "thrusts out" for his kisses both "a figged fist and foul cigar" (pp. 531, 534). S/he refers to herself as a lady and tells Bloom to call her "mistress" although the stage directions assign Bello the male pronouns (p. 539). Likewise Bloom, as self-declared woman, has "large male hands and nose" (p. 536). Bello taunts Bloom for urinating sitting down and commands him to "Do it standing, sir!"—and a moment later "bares his arm and plunges it elbow deep in Bloom's vulva" (pp. 537, 539).

Bloom's relationship to Bella is as changeable as their respective genders. As the ottoman to a very solid cigar smoker and Gazette reader Bloom seems to be a literally downtrodden wife. Renamed Ruby Cohen, Bloom seems to have been adopted by his tormentor, who mockingly describes his domestic economies as "jobs that make mother pleased" (p. 536). Owned with the "ruby ring," Bloom is a fiancée awaiting "the night before the wedding" but also a "maid of all work" (p. 539). Finally he is a "male prostitute" offered by Bello to other men (pp. 542, 540).

If Bloom's masochistic hallucinations illuminate the psychological complexities half-concealed in Masoch's story, they do so, as Ellmann points out, in "a vaudeville version."¹⁸ Subtlety is sacrificed to clarity and the exquisite depiction of pitiable emotions in *Venus in Furs* is lost. However, Stephen's hallucinations provide a counterbalance of delicately drawn anguish. Unlike Bloom's visions in form, Stephen's are very similar in content. In his drunken babble of "Circe's or what am I saying Ceres' altar" Stephen confuses, as Bloom does, the "laughing witch" with the fertile mother (pp. 500, 504). Stephen's pronouncement, "Blessed be the eight beatitudes," summons a procession of eight of his drinking companions in which Mulligan is the seventh named (p. 509). The semicoherent recitation of the British beatitudes which follows reminds us that the seventh is "buggery" and also perhaps reminds us of Stephen's train of thought on the beach, as looking at

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Mulligan's big shoe on his own little foot, he thinks "you were delighted when Esther Osvalt's shoe went on you . . . *Tiens, quel petit pied!* Staunch friend, a brother soul: Wilde's love that dare not speak its name" (p. 49). Reinforcing the impression, "beautiful Best" makes a brief reappearance.

Florry's request for "Love's old sweet song" brings another convoluted string of associations on the same themes (p. 518). The Siamese twins recall Stephen's joke in "Oxen of the Sun" in which the fleshly union of a dead thing and a live twin is compared to the "sacred" union of man and woman (pp. 411-12). This joke suggests a connection between Bloom and Stephen because the former is inextricably bound by nature and religious law to his wife and the latter to his mother of whom he is the "image" (p. 663). For both, these bonds are a source of pain. The second appearance of the twin motif adds resonances. As "Oxford dons" they are reminiscent of Mulligan, with his "manner of Oxenford," but also of "donnish" Stephen (p. 217). Tindall's speculation—"maybe they have Matthew Arnold's face to suggest Hebraism and Hellenism or Jewgreek"—seems valid.¹⁹ Like the metamorphosed dog on the beach in "Proteus," they are also "dogsbody" and "Unattired" buck at bay, persecutor and persecuted united in one flesh, as they argue and insult each other (p. 46). When Kitty's recitation of the tragic tale of Mary Shortall and Jimmy Pidgeon inspires Stephen to remember a sacrilegious joke the twists of levity and pain form an even more elaborate knot as his hallucination ties together mismatched twins, the Virgin mother, diseased whore, and happy male-violated male in one identity and names the Holy Ghost as its betrayer and the (indirect) murderer of his own son (pp. 520-21). No wonder Matthew Arnold has been evoked—"Everywhere we see the beginnings of confusion."

Florry's insistence that Stephen is "a spoiled priest" sparks a vision that suggests that Stephen feels he has ruined himself. Stephen's hallucination of himself as "Simon Stephen Cardinal Dedalus" seems inspired by Flaubert's description of the Queen of Sheba appearing in a vision to tempt St. Anthony.²⁰ The actions of the dwarves recall not only those of Flaubert's "*Douze négrillons crépus*" but also Lynch's repeated efforts to get a "nickle dime bumshow" from the whores (pp. 502, 511, 428). Father and son, tormenter and tormented, religious figure and whore are once again united in one being that Stephen claims as self.

Bloom accepts punishment as a romping charade and his two immolations are empty rituals from which he emerges to casually begin again, but Stephen, like Severin, seems driven toward real torture and

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real annihilation (pp. 499, 544–45). When he gives his hand to Zoe and “chants to the air of the bloodoath in the *Dusk of the Gods*,” he smilingly but honestly contracts himself to the Venus who “Macht uns alle kaput” (p. 560). Zoe’s mocking pronouncements, “Blue eyed beauty,” “No wit,” “Woman’s hand,” remind Stephen of his punishments at school, which gave him no pleasure, but despite his denial of courage he urges her to “Continue. Lie. Hold me. Caress” (pp. 561–62). The pathos of Severin’s situation, banished in the broad comedy of Bloom’s ordeals, reappears in Stephen’s briefer, quieter visions, and because Bloom and Stephen are Siamese twins of a sort, mystically connected, Stephen’s more profoundly experienced pain gives tragic shadings to Bloom’s comedy.

When both men look into the mirror together they see the past, present, and future of vulnerable man bound to changeable woman. Shakespeare’s garbled speech comments on the situation that obsesses each of them. Of course, Bloom shares an essential problem with the cuckold Shakespeare, and as the hallucination that directly precedes this vision demonstrates, Bloom realizes that he has played the roles of both Iago and Othello “bawd and cuckold” (p. 212). He has, in fact, exceeded Iago; his Desdemona actually is an adulteress. But “Thursdaymornun” suggests someone other than the (on) Thursday moaning, adulterous Molly (p. 567). Stephen has told Zoe that he was born on a Thursday (p. 562). He has also asserted that Anne Hathaway was the inspiration for Desdemona and through a series of associations mentally connected guilty Anne to his own innocent mother (pp. 212, 190). May Dedalus is the Thursday *maman* that he fears he has killed, a sacrifice to his pride, his “unremitting intellect” (p. 212).

However, Stephen does “have reasons” to take on the role of Hamlet because May, like Mary in his joke, has been corrupted by “the sacred pigeon,” who, like Claudius, is a poisoner of pious ears (p. 207). And in the horrible echo of the comic scene in which Bello tries to sell Bloom to “the Caliph Haroun al Raschid,” May offers up her son to the “corpsechewer” (pp. 540, 581). Stephen has dreamed of Haroun al Raschid and continually compares himself to Christ but neither man wants to be “a wife unto himself” (pp. 47, 213). Stephen rejects union in “love, grief and agony” with “The Mother” as Christ and escapes into the street to seek contact (albeit unsuccessfully) with an honest whore and to find the relief of physical pain.

Stephen’s contemptuous taunting of the soldiers and Bloom’s obsequious crawling to Boylan and Molly (in his hallucination) are such obviously different modes of behavior that they seem to arise from diametrically opposed attitudes, but both reflect aspects of Masoch’s

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vision. In *Venus in Furs*, Wanda and Severin consider moving to a country where slavery is legal but decide against it because the essence of their shared fantasy is that the slave submit "helplessly" out of love "not because of law, of property rights, or compulsions."²¹ Bloom, in "flunkey's plum plush coat" masturbating as he watches his dream-vision of Boylan and Molly, and Stephen, declaring "*Non serviam*" to Church and State and, determinedly weaponless, accepting meek martyrdom to the representatives of Britain, both enact roles that Severin finds compatible (pp. 565-67, 582, 600-01). Theodor Reik's description seems applicable to all three: "The Masochist exhibits the punishment but also its failure. He shows his submission certainly, but he also shows his invincible rebellion, demonstrating that he gains pleasure despite the discomfort. . . . He cannot be broken from outside. He has an inexhaustible capacity for taking a beating and yet knows unconsciously he is not licked."²²

By telling the basic story of all "flagellation literature" in a farcical form and a heroic form and then interweaving the two so that they comment continuously upon each other, Joyce opens out *Venus in Furs* to tell us more about the pleasures within and the compulsions behind masochism than can Masoch, whose story demands that he take it all seriously. But "Circe" is far more than a reinterpretation of Masoch's novel. It is the climactic chapter of *Ulysses*, the chapter in which Bloom and Stephen move as close as they will come on that day to resolution of their problems. The masochistic themes, which reach their dramatic culmination in "Circe," run through all of *Ulysses*, as do allusions to *Venus in Furs*.

Ellmann mentions one instance in which Joyce's use of a detail from Masoch's novel is not limited to "Circe"—"the marble statuette that Bloom takes home in the rain, and . . . the nymph, 'beautiful immortal,' whose 'classic curves' are pictured above his bed, are paralleled in the 'stonecold and pure' plaster cast of Venus to which Severin prays in *Venus in Furs*."²³ Other parallels include: the over-all structure of the novels (each is divided into three segments), repeated comparisons of woman to cat and man to dog, use of lion as an emblem of sexuality, and use of the sea as an image of feminine power. Masoch's continual references to "a small woman's hand" as a symbol of her paradoxical strength are echoed in Stephen's belief that he collapsed because of "the reapparition of a matutinal cloud . . . at first no bigger than a woman's hand" (p. 667).

Two remarkable parallels seem to lend credence to Fritz Senn's idea that Bloom did not ask for eggs in the morning but that Molly

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simply misunderstood his "somnolent mumblings."²⁴ The only evidence that Severin has, as he says, been "cured" is his appallingly sadistic treatment of the "attractive, stoutish" woman who fails to bring him the sort of eggs he has ordered.²⁵ In Molly's astounded view, Bloom seems to have turned into hardly less of a tyrant, but his last thoughts before falling asleep completely lack the harshness of the "cured" Severin and more closely resemble the philosophy Severin expresses in his diary after he decides to remain with Wanda on her terms: "Love knows no virtue, no profit; it loves and forgives and suffers everything because it must. It is not our judgment that leads us. . . . We cease to think, to feel, to will: we let ourselves be carried away by it, and ask not whither."²⁶ Masochism, as Masoch depicts it here, seems no different from the passionate, swooning surrender that Stephen experiences with the prostitute in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or the rapture Bloom felt "under wild ferns on Howth" as he was pulled down and kissed (p. 176). Although not attracted, as Bloom is, to the idea of physical pain, Stephen seems equally unattracted to the role of sexual aggressor. He seems to long to be overcome as thoroughly as Bloom was on Howth. He interrupts his theory of the marital woes of Shakespeare, "overborne in a cornfield" and forever "undone" with the surprisingly envious (silent) comments "And my turn? When? Come!" and "Wait to be wooed and won. Ay, meacock. Who will woo you?" (pp. 196, 191, 210). "Touch me. . . . Touch, touch me" is Stephen's erotic litany, reflected in Bloom's "We are their harps" (pp. 49, 271).

Does an inclination toward submission to the beloved woman necessarily indicate that a man has a sexual problem? Sultan believes that Bloom asks Molly to make his breakfast because "he has recovered his manhood" and consequently "wants uxorial service from her."²⁷ Ellmann ridicules the idea that Joyce meant us to believe Bloom's virility was impaired because he cooked (and could be repaired if he stopped).²⁸ One might easily take this argument a step further. Neither Molly's monologue nor Bloom's reminiscences indicate that Bloom was more masterful with Molly in the early days of their marriage. In fact, while she was still "dying to find out was he circumcised," his way of getting her to grant him a sexual favor was to threaten to "kneel down in the wet" (p. 746). Yet Bloom impregnated Molly twice. Joyce seems to be suggesting that submissiveness, even masochism, far from presenting an impediment to procreation, can be part of the expression of virile passion, a "real man" can be "strong to the verge of weakness" and even beyond (p. 651).

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A year before the events of *Bloomsday*, Havelock Ellis wrote, in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, which Joyce was later to read:

Masochism is commonly regarded as a peculiarly feminine perversion, in women, indeed, as normal in some degree, and in man as a sort of inversion of the normal masculine emotional attitude, but this view is not altogether justified. . . . In a minor degree, not amounting to a complete perversion of the sexual instinct, this sentiment of abnegation, the desire to be even physically subjected to the adored woman, cannot be regarded as abnormal.²⁹

He argued that masochistic sentiments inform much romantic literature and that "passion in its more lyric exaltations almost necessarily involves some resort to masochistic expression."³⁰ His description of the "normal" masochist as a man "of complex and sensitive nature" who desires "submission to the female's will" and craves "to experience in some physical or psychic form, not necessarily painful, the manifestation of her activity" seems applicable to both Bloom and Stephen.³¹

The two imperatives that come to Stephen in the library—"Act. Be acted on"—are not contradictory; nonetheless, neither Bloom nor Stephen seems capable of acting with a woman on June 16 in any way except to avoid contact with her (p. 211). Neither man acts to satisfy his much reiterated longing for loving contact with a woman. And this avoidance of the thing desired is also a kind of masochism. While *Ulysses* may seem to present many variations of masochistic behavior, it actually divides masochism neatly into two types: the eroticization of pain and the eroticization of denial. The first, in all its infinite variety, is shown to be not incompatible with procreative sexual activity. The second, by definition must be.

Joyce gives us many clues as to why Stephen "*Autontimerumenos*" spends his time toadying to men he despises and drunkenly entertaining repulsive whores and why Bloom has not had "complete carnal intercourse, with ejaculation of semen within the natural female organ" in eleven years (pp. 210, 736). In addition to desire, both men feel toward women a complex mixture of contempt, pity, and guilt. David Hayman conjectures that Molly is "the ultimate siren" in "*Sirens*," but that paradoxically "*Ulysses-Bloom*" would be saved if he could go to her rather than staying away, "paralysed by fear and guilt."³² However, since Bloom's guilt seems to arise from his sexual neglect of Molly, his fear seems to be the deciding emotion. Both Bloom's and Stephen's fear of and reluctance to have contact with women might be explained by their belief that women are in some way evil, contemptible creatures.

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Their contempt for women is conventional; indeed, it is the most conventional sentiment each man shows during the course of the day.³³ Ellmann finds a great difference between Stephen's and Bloom's thoughts about women. He writes, "For Stephen women are distant creatures, changeable as the moon and to be seen mythically as great sources of fertility and corruption. . . . Bloom has a different view. . . . Women, not woman, interest him."³⁴ While this is generally the case, Bloom's is not always a "kindlier vision."³⁵ Stephen's references to "woman's unclean loins, of man's flesh made not in God's likeness, the serpent's prey" and "Eve. Naked wheatbellied sin. A snake coils her, fang in's kiss" sound less like Bloom than Deasy, holding forth about Cassandra, Eve, Helen, and MacMurrough's wife, each "a woman who was no better than she should be" (pp. 14, 199, 33-35). And Stephen's cruel image of his mother as Ireland, the feminized betrayer—"thou hast suckled me with a bitter milk . . . thou hast left me alone for ever in the dark ways of my bitterness: and with a kiss of ashes thou hast kissed my mouth" is less like Bloom's vision of the Promised Land as "the grey sunken cunt of the world," through no fault of its/her own, than like the citizen's pronouncement that a "dishonoured wife [is] the cause of all our misfortunes" (pp. 393, 61, 324). However, Stephen's ungrateful description of the prostitute he had in Fumbally's lane as having a "she-fiend's whiteness" seems as much like Bloom's characterization of Gerty as "that little limping devil," as it is like Lenehan's reference to Molly's breasts as "Hell's delights" (pp. 47, 370, 234).

In Bloom's case the contempt often seems to be a result of his resentment of his own situation as husband to a wife who "wears the pants." An early morning exchange with the cat reveals how quickly Bloom can pass from wounded pride to contempt: "Wonder what I look like to her. Height of a tower? No she can jump me.—Afraid of the chickens she is, he said mockingly. . . . I never saw such a stupid pussens" (p. 55). Yet his next thought is of the pleasure he presumes mice enjoy in her clutches. At one point the thought of a married sailor's return home reminds Bloom of going "into the house of bondage" but elsewhere this destination seems to him simply part of his heritage (pp. 378, 122). His angry response to the nymph's rejection, that he has never gotten a "studfee" but put in "sixteen years of black slave labour" without hope of "five shillings alimony," is followed by some arrogant posturing toward Bella, but he soon settles into another fantasy of ecstatic servitude (p. 554). Bloom's recognition that the "Flower to console" him has a pin which "cuts lo" does not seem to put

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him off (p. 263). As he tells his aristocratic threateners, "I love the danger" (p. 467).

For Stephen contempt is clearly a direct response to unbearable pity and guilt. Haunted by the memory of his mother dying and weeping over "love's bitter mystery," knowing that "someone killed her," and that he has denied her last request, Stephen must reduce her from the savior of his childhood, who "had saved him from being trampled under foot and had gone, scarcely having been" to an "allwoombing tomb" (pp. 9, 5, 28, 48). If he is ashamed of wanting to peek under a widow's skirts, he makes her a "squaw," or of shouting "*naked women*" he defiantly asks, "What else were they invented for?" (p. 40). Drinking rich cocoa with Bloom, he remembers his sister, Dilly, "waiting for some weak Trinidad shell cocoa that was in the sootcoated kettle to be done so that she and he could drink it with the oatmeal water for milk" (p. 620). He has deserted her, despite his knowledge that "she is drowning" not in the "shellcocoacoloured" waters that make him think of his failure to save his mother, but in the same element that took May (pp. 243, 46). After leaving Dilly to her fate, Stephen is seen drunkenly arguing that birth-control devices should never be used and that if a woman's life is endangered in childbirth "that earthly mother which was but a dam to bring forth beastly should die" (pp. 389-90). The professor's comparison of Stephen to Antisthenes, who was full of bitterness apparently because "he was the son of a noble and a bondswoman," may be more apt than it at first seems (pp. 148-49).

Bloom, less bitter than Stephen, has no lack of pity for women. The rumor that Mr. Power keeps a mistress makes Bloom think "Not pleasant for the wife" (p. 93). The grayness of John O'Connell's beard (a sign of "temper getting cross") brings a sympathetic thought of Mrs. O'Connell (pp. 107-08). Bloom is sorry for skinny, ragged Dilly and "shabby," worn-out Mrs. Breen (pp. 152, 158, 321). His vengeful fantasy of Molly old and abandoned, "big Spanishy eyes goggling at nothing" ends with a snap of honest recollection that "too much happy bores" him and anyway he too is unfaithful (p. 277). He is sorry for the "waiting, waiting wife of Pat the waiter" and the wife of Wilkins the high school flasher (pp. 283, 371). Nevertheless, this compassion for the generally vulnerable position of women does not seem to keep Bloom from seeing them as possible sexual partners. He reminds himself (successfully) "be on your guard not to feel too much pity" about Gerty and, through the alter ego Virag, checks his sympathy for Kitty (pp. 377, 512).

Like Stephen, Bloom is most profoundly affected, even paralyzed,

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by his pity for mothers. His response to the knowledge that Boylan has taken "the horn" to Molly and to the teasing threats of the girls in "Nausicaä" to "give it to him" on his "beetoteetum" is defiantly virile, but he becomes impotent after overhearing Mrs. Purefoy's sufferings in childbed (pp. 267, 353). In "Hades" Bloom's thoughts of "women dead in childbirth," the way women's minds must be kept off death "to conceive at all," the "mother and deadborn child . . . buried in the one coffin," and the "love that kills" blend in with the other musings on death (pp. 194, 108, 110, 114). But he does not leave this theme behind in the graveyard. Of Dedalus, Bloom thinks "Fifteen children he had. Birth every year almost," and later, "Wore out his wife: now sings" (pp. 151, 274). His confusion over Mrs. Purefoy's name seems to come from a similar judgment. Philip Beaufoy is associated in his mind with "the masterstroke" and with the sort of sentimental and romantic literature that inspires Gerty's dreams of marriage in "a nice snug cosy little homey house" where a kind, sober, hardworking husband gives "his dear little wifey a good hearty hug" (pp. 158, 352).

Thinking of the romantic pleasures of girlhood, Bloom decides "Sad however because it lasts only a few years till they settle down to potwalloping and papa's pants will soon fit Willy and fuller's earth for the baby when they hold him out to do ah ah" (p. 373). His next thoughts are of Mrs. Dignam's bereavement, "Mrs. Beaufoy, Purefoy," and Mrs. Breen, "once like that too, marriageable," all of whom have been knocked low by the masterstroke from "the lord and master" (pp. 373, 157). "Matcham often thinks the laughing witch. Poor Mrs. Purefoy" (p. 280). The stroke brings agony, "belly swollen out," of which Bloom thinks "kill me that would" (p. 161). As the day passes with Bloom "woman's woe with wonder pondering," it becomes clear that although he wanted and still wants "a woman who can deliver the goods," he does not want to sentence Molly to "Live with hard labour" or even to another fruitless ordeal like her last pregnancy (pp. 388, 282, 161).

Molly, herself, despite her "Gea-Tellus" posture in the bed and ardent love of nature seems by no means eager to have another baby (pp. 737, 781-82). She wishes men could know "what I went through with Milly," and thinks of Mr. Purefoy, "not satisfied till they have us swollen out like elephants" (p. 742). Her memories of her girlhood fears of being left "with a child embarazada" inspire hostile thoughts about men and pleasant reminiscences of how she "tortured the life out of" one (p. 760). Her fears about menstruating too early are balanced by relief that "anyhow he didn't make me pregnant" (p. 769). Thoughts

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of the devious ways of men cause her to think of the deformed babies in "the Aristocrats Masterpiece" and to comment "as if we hadn't enough of that in real life" (p. 772). The one time that pregnancy seems to appeal to Molly as "awfully jolly," her phrasing—"suppose I risked having another"—suggests that Bloom's sexual restraint has not frustrated any conscious maternal desires on her part (p. 742). In fact, her comment on Rudy's death—"I knew well I'd never have another"—implies that she decided then not to become pregnant again, not an unusual decision for a mother in her situation to make (p. 778). Since she and Bloom had "normal" sex just "5 weeks previous, viz. 27 November 1893, to the birth" there seems to have been no reason for her to have known that pregnancy was no longer a possibility unless she had decided to tell Bloom to seek less risky methods of satisfaction (p. 736).

Sultan has taken the line in Joyce's March 22 letter to Frank Budgen, "am working hard at *Oxen of the Sun*, the idea being the crime committed against fecundity by sterilizing the act of coition," to mean that Joyce was strictly opposed to contraceptives.³⁶ Nonetheless, as Brown points out, fertility in "*Oxen of the Sun*" seems to be as much of a curse as a blessing.³⁷ When Bannon and Mulligan arrive at the hospital, the latter entertains the crowd with some boasting about his willingness to impregnate all pleasant and attractive women "the poorest kitchenwench no less than the opulent lady of fashion," and Bannon regrets being without his "cloak" when he was with Milly in Mulligan (pp. 402, 404–05). Mulligan's belly has "never bore a bastard" and never will, but fifteen-year-old Milly's can, as the discussion of the problems with birth-control devices that follows reminds us (pp. 404–05). Bloom's reminiscence of his first sexual experience also implies that human sympathy opposes fertility in some cases. All the while Mrs. Purefoy screams, trying to give her child life "at the risk of her own" (p. 420).

Certain word choices in the parodies also have unpleasant reverberations. In a novel with as many references to Shakespeare as *Ulysses*, Bannon's complaint about traveling without his cloak seems intended to bring Sonnet 34 to mind—"Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day / And make me travel forth without my cloak"—a sonnet that has much to say about "disgrace," "shame," "loss," and "offence." Joyce's choice of the name "Doady" out of all Dickens' work is even more ominously suggestive because it is Dora Copperfield's nickname for her husband. In Dickens' novel, Dora's baby dies just after birth: "The spirit fluttered for a moment on the threshold of its little prison,

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and unconscious of captivity, took wing."³⁸ Afterward Dora weakens and dies herself. Opposed to Dickens' sentimental vision is the apparition, "On the altarstone Mrs. Mina Purefoy, goddess of unreason, lies naked, fettered, a chalice resting on her swollen belly" (p. 599).

Both Stephen and Bloom remember a line from Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*: "The sentimentalist is he who would enjoy without incurring the immense debtorship for the thing done" (pp. 199, 412). And, unlike the narrator who praises Purefoy for knocking "another child out of her," they are not sentimentalists, and they know that their love, even if it is submissive rather than aggressive, has as one of its aims to re-create their own lives at the expense of their beloveds' safety and romantic dreams (pp. 421, 408). One alternative to incurring this immense debt is to avoid contact with women. As Deasy says of the Jews, they cannot be persecuted if they are never let in (p. 36). "Eunuch. One way out of it," notes Bloom (p. 82). Less extreme escapes are offered by the bachelors who "Unwed, unfancied, ware of wiles, they fingerponder nightly each his variorum edition of *The Taming of the Shrew*" (p. 213). Perhaps the most seductive alternative is offered by the sailor of "Eumaeus," whose once painful physical memento of Antonio "a Greek" suggests Severin's ultimate sexual encounter (p. 631). But Stephen as well as Bloom "pointedly [turns] a deafear" not only to "six sixteen," "Antonio and so forth" but to all the day's enticements away from union with woman (p. 646). "Both admitted the alternately stimulating and obtunding influence of heterosexual magnetism," and both obey its pull (p. 666).

Bloom makes his choice in "Hades" and spends his day moving circuitously, back to "a woman. . . . Life. Life" (p. 89). He rejects the sterility of the antisexual nymph but accepts his role as "Adorer of the adulterous rump," and glories in "divaricated thighs" even when they are not spread for him alone (pp. 530, 552). Stephen rejects the sterility of adoration of death offered by the ghost mother but accepts "the pain of love," "the bitter mystery" that the live mother knew and, as he regains consciousness, relives the moment when he tried to give her comfort (pp. 5, 609). At the end of "Circe" the ruby that has haunted Bloom throughout the episode is out of the ring and placed on Rudy's breast (pp. 443, 482, 535, 539, 609). The evasive rituals of sterile masochism are over and the painful and pleasurable submission to the act of and responsibility for procreation must begin.

Nothing seems settled at the end of *Ulysses*, but progress has been made. Bloom has returned to the womb not that bore him but that can bear more of his children. Stephen, in contrast, as Hayman points out,

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has rejected "the Oedipal mate" who could help him "fill the void left by his mother's death."³⁹ Possibly he does so because she could never be "*sua donna*" or answer his inner plea "*Amor me solo*," nor could she give him a child that he could acknowledge as his own (pp. 210, 242). Molly's fantasies are of a shining clean poet like "those fine young men I could see down in Margate Strand bathing," a Buck Mulligan, in fact, with whom she could while away some lonely hours (pp. 775-76). Stephen is moving not toward adultery but toward marriage, that terrifying place that has almost finished Bloom and may "immolate" Stephen, "consenting," but that is the only place where the pain of love can result in joyously welcomed new life (p. 692).

¹ Richard Brown, *James Joyce and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 1-2.

² William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce* (New York: Farrar, 1959), p. 207.

³ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1914; rpt. New York: Random House, 1961), pp. 64-65. Subsequent references in the text are to this edition.

⁴ Stanley Sultan, *The Argument of Ulysses* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 310, 328.

⁵ Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980), p. 118.

⁶ Brown, *James Joyce and Sexuality*, p. 112.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸ Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (1959; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 380-81.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

¹⁰ Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, translator anonymous (New York: Sylvan Press, 1974), p. 54.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 29, 30.

¹² Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians* (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 252.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-57.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59.

¹⁷ Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, p. 116.

¹⁸ Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 381.

¹⁹ Tindall, *Reader's Guide*, p. 212.

²⁰ Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's Ulysses: A Study* (London: Faber, 1952), p. 322.

²¹ Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, pp. 65, 68.

²² Theodor Reik, *Masochism in Sex and Society*, trans. M. H. Beigel (New York: Grove Press, 1962), pp. 145, 163.

²³ Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 381.

²⁴ Fritz Senn, *Joyce's Dislocations: Essays on Reading as Translation*, ed. John Paul Riquelme (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 104-05.

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²⁵ Sacher-Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, pp. 21–22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²⁷ Sultan, *The Argument of Ulysses*, pp. 402–420.

²⁸ Richard Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), p. 161.

²⁹ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, (1903; rpt. Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1923), III, 111.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 112.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² David Hayman, *Ulysses: The Mechanics of Meaning* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 45.

³³ Bloom's love for his children is essentially a conventional sentiment, but the intensity of his attachment to Rudy, who lived such a short time so long ago, and his recognition of Milly's sexual autonomy seem to diverge from the norms of parental feelings.

³⁴ Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey*, p. 47.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

³⁶ Sultan, *The Argument of Ulysses*, pp. 285–95.

³⁷ Brown, *James Joyce and Sexuality*, pp. 70–78.

³⁸ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1869; rpt. New York: Dell, 1958), p. 344).

³⁹ Hayman, *Ulysses: the Mechanics of Meaning*, p. 35.

Absent Father, Passive Son: The Dilemma of Rickie Elliott in *The Longest Journey*

CAROLA M. KAPLAN

The fundamental task of every son, as the neo-Freudian Jacques Lacan has pointed out, is to come to terms with his father. In order to do so, he must abandon the imaginary state of non-differentiation or fusion with the mother to assume his symbolic place within the family triad. Not only the child's predecessor within the family, but the symbolic embodiment of law and language, the father is the transcendent signifier whose legacy is orderly progression both in life and in narrative. Since language expresses desire, which originates in absence, the child's acknowledgment of the father is accompanied by a permanent sense of loss. Accordingly, the child's accommodation is always problematical and imperfect. The imperfect outcome of this universal struggle gets expressed in the nature of narrative itself: although primarily linear and orderly, all narrative collapses at times into disorder—into digression, evasion, omission, ambiguity, and contradiction. Some narratives irretrievably founder on the way, either broken on the hard rock of Scylla, the father, or swallowed by the chaos and absorption of the mother, Charybdis.¹ *The Longest Journey* is such a narrative. While its unfolding appears to be linear, it is actually circular and repetitious. Finally it collapses upon itself.

The most unconscious and personal of Forster's published novels, *The Longest Journey* was, in Forster's words, the one he was "most glad to have written."² He nevertheless was regretfully aware that it was seriously flawed. Critics have generally agreed. Indeed, the book suffers from a number of problems, among them the author's ambivalence

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toward his protagonist, the contrivance of the plot, the heavy-handed symbolism, and the gratuitous "sacrificial" death of the main character. Yet the book is fascinating, vivid, and strange: it has far greater vitality and psychological depth than Forster's more apparently finished novels of this early period, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *A Room with a View*. I would argue that the book's narrative problems, as well as its unique intensity, stem from the pervasiveness of the oedipal conflicts which it presents in disguised forms but fails to resolve within the text.

These conflicts center in Forster's protagonist, Rickie Elliott. Having been abandoned in childhood by his father, first through neglect and then through death, Rickie as a young adult is confused and irresolute, fixed in the constellation of his childhood feelings—hatred of his father and idealization of his mother. The novel stages a series of successive unsatisfactory solutions to Rickie's dilemma. While apparently charting a progression or movement in Rickie's life, the novel actually demonstrates Rickie's paralysis. In apparently different forms, the novel presents but fails to resolve the same psychological and sexual problems. The treatment of these episodes is marked by disguise and evasion, both socially necessary for the author and psychologically imposed upon the character, which result in the collapse of both the protagonist and the narrative.

The title of the novel, *The Longest Journey*, signals the central problem of the text. Drawn from a passage in Shelley's "Epipsychidion,"³ the words in their original context are part of an extended declamation against the folly of loving one person to the exclusion of all others. In general, the title has been interpreted as Forster's criticism of marriage, in particular of the marriage of his semi-autobiographical protagonist, Rickie Elliott. Because this marriage denies and betrays his fundamental homosexuality, Rickie Elliott appears to be a martyr on the altar of conventionality. For this reason, the novel seems to be Forster's exploration of a "There but for the grace of God go I" theme. In actuality, however, the exclusive and suffocating relationship which the novel inveighs against is Rickie's continued attachment to his dead mother, which makes both independent action and other relationships impossible for him.

On the surface, the novel asserts the value of Rickie's continued devotion to his mother. In fact, it offers as the only consolation for Rickie's death at the end the fact that, by sacrificing his own life to save that of his half-brother, Stephen, Rickie ensures that his mother's line will continue. Indeed, the novel's last words offer the comfort that Stephen has a daughter to whom he has given "the name of their

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mother.”⁴ On the other hand, the subtext of the novel makes clear that Rickie’s regressive efforts to bring his mother back to life undermine him and that he thereby avoids the more difficult task, essential to his own salvation, of claiming his dead father both as genitor and as point of origin (what Lacan refers to as the Name-of-the-Father).⁵ Only by fulfilling this task can Rickie assume his symbolic position as the third point in the family and social triad, permanently distinct from both mother and father, freed from the danger of reabsorption and death.

Because Rickie’s loving but remote mother died when he was only fifteen, Rickie still longs for her and wishes to bring her back to life. Indeed, the novel offers Rickie two opportunities symbolically to do so. He finds these opportunities so irresistible that he succumbs to the second, while suffering from the disastrous results of the first.

The first opportunity offers itself to him in the figure of Agnes, who misleadingly reminds him of his dead mother. The second opportunity presents itself more ambiguously in the form of his half-brother, Stephen. Rickie’s seductive opportunity to bring his mother back to life, his ability to get “to a place where only one thing matters—that the Beloved should rise from the dead” (p. 249), proves to be a poisonous magic apple, luscious on the surface, lethal at the core. The subtext makes clear that the only way that the son can claim his own self is to leave the mother behind. In order to do so, he must undertake a quest for the absent father, an ordeal akin to the journeyings of traditional heroes, including Oedipus and Parsifal, to whom Rickie is compared in the text. By finding, identifying with, repudiating, and finally transcending the father, Rickie can claim and name himself, freed from passivity to independent action. But, although offered many opportunities, Rickie is repeatedly unable to do so. Accordingly, his return to the mother proves to be “the dreariest and the longest journey,” indeed, one which offers no possibility other than death.

The novel opens on Rickie in a dormant state, a seed embedded in the fertile soil of Cambridge, ready to germinate. The opening scene, set in Rickie’s room, emphasizes his passivity and receptiveness: while his friends argue both sides of the old subject-object opposition, questioning whether “the cow is there” (p. 3), Rickie absorbs pleasant sensory impressions, savors the company of his friends, and observes of the two opposed arguments, “Either way it was attractive” (p. 4). Although Rickie disparages himself for lack of ability at debate, the narrative supports him in his unwillingness to take an either/or position and gently undercuts the narrowness of those who do. The imagery

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surrounding Rickie's philosopher friends—their shadows reflected on the walls of Rickie's firelit room—recalls Plato's Allegory of the Cave (the allusion to Plato is reinforced by the narrative reference to the group as a "symposium" [p. 6]). Their limitations are further underscored when Rickie later acknowledges that Ansell cannot "understand lovers or a dying man" and that Cambridge dons "dealt with so much and they had experienced so little. Was it possible he would ever come to think Cambridge narrow?" (p. 57).

Yet, as Ansell observes, although Cambridge is a limited world, it is a good one, because it does not pretend to be the great world. The particular poignancy the Cambridge world holds for Rickie is its transitoriness: it is merely "the perishable home that was his for a couple of years" (p. 59). While Cambridge has cared for him like a loving mother ("Cambridge . . . had taken and soothed him, and warmed him, and had laughed at him a little, saying that he must not be so tragic yet awhile" [p. 5]), she will expel him into larger experiences, for which he feels unprepared. His experience at Cambridge is, moreover, the most satisfactory period of his life. Indeed, the disproportionately long "Cambridge" section of the narrative prepares the reader for the fact that Rickie will never again enjoy so authentic an experience. As he points out to Ansell, "There'll never again be a home for me like Cambridge. I shall only look at the outside of homes" (p. 63). The narrative demonstrates that Rickie's anxiety is justified, for he is doomed.

While Rickie is at Cambridge, Ansell attempts to save him from his doom. Ansell, whose strength of character derives largely from his balanced relationship with his father and clear distinction from him, raises for Rickie the central question of the book. After Rickie has asserted "I hate no one," Ansell asks, "Not even your father?" (p. 20). Answering this question is crucial for Rickie, and is fundamentally connected with his development. Rickie has not yet attained the inclusive outlook he admires and which the book on the whole advocates, an outlook which would synthesize intellect, imagination, and intuition, the book's three points of value. What appears to be inclusiveness at this stage in Rickie's life is actually indeterminacy and lack of definition. In order for Rickie to achieve his own integrated view of the world, he must learn who he is, a task he can accomplish only through knowing his origin. Yet Rickie never answers Ansell's leading question, choosing instead to elicit sympathy by telling his life story to his friends rather than take a position which might alienate some of them.

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Because Rickie has failed to seize the opportunity that Ansell offered him, he goes on to make one of the crucial errors of his life. This mistake follows from an apparently innocuous incident. Rickie stumbles upon the lovers Agnes and Gerald, locked in each other's arms. This incident re-evokes for him what Freud terms the primal scene of early childhood,⁶ the young child's inadvertent observation of his parents making love. That Gerald and Agnes are psychologically and symbolically equated with his parents in Rickie's mind is clear from the language of the text. Prior to this scene, Rickie has misinterpreted Agnes' breeziness and Gerald's brusqueness to mean that they do not love each other. His false misgivings derive from his connecting them in his mind with his parents: "It was dreadful: they did not love each other. More dreadful even than the case of his father and mother, for they, until they married, had got on pretty well" (p. 39). As the scene proceeds, it appears to be a reworking in a more satisfactory way of a scene between his parents that Rickie had witnessed. Rickie had heard his mother crying, running from the bedroom, after his father had slapped her (p. 25). In the scene between Gerald and Agnes, Agnes complains that the rough Gerald is hurting her, until he kisses her, whereupon she appears transformed: "Her face had no expression. . . . Then her lover kissed it, and immediately it shone with mysterious beauty, like some star" (p. 39). Rickie's response to this scene is clearly not that of a peer but of a child stumbling upon adults: "It was the merest accident that Rickie had not been disgusted. But this he could not know" (p. 40).

Witnessing this primal scene between Gerald and Agnes reawakens Rickie's libidinous longings for his mother—longings which are intensified by Rickie's earlier refusal to acknowledge his father and his father's relationship with his mother. At first, Rickie's response is to idealize the lovers. But when Gerald dies, Rickie reengages in the fantasy of possessing the forbidden mother. Again, the descriptions of Agnes and of Rickie's feelings about her point out the fact that Agnes is a stand-in for Mrs. Elliott. When Rickie first brings Agnes to meet his Aunt Emily, she equates Rickie with his father and Agnes with his mother, pointing out that Agnes has uttered the "exact words" his mother did on that occasion (p. 93). Finally, Rickie notes that Agnes is similar to Mrs. Elliott in her reticence and emotional distance: "She was not cold; she would willingly embrace him. But she hated being upset, and would laugh or thrust him off when his voice grew serious. In this she reminded him of his mother" (p. 168).

Because his love for Agnes is but his love for his dead mother in

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disguise, Rickie feels extremely guilty. The language describing these feelings makes clear that it is not merely that Rickie feels unworthy of love and hates himself, but that he sees Agnes in particular as a forbidden love object because he sees her as belonging permanently to Gerald, who in his cruel treatment of Rickie, reminded him of his father:

It was hard on Rickie thus to meet the devil. He did not deserve it, for he was comparatively civilized, and knew there was nothing shameful in love. But to love this woman! If only it had been anyone else! Love in return—that he could expect from no one, being too ugly and unattractive. But the love he offered would not then have been vile. The insult to Miss Pembroke, who was consecrated, and whom he had consecrated, who could still see Gerald, and always would see him, shining on his everlasting throne—this was the crime from the devil, the crime that no penance would ever purge. She knew nothing. She never would know. But the crime was registered in heaven. (p. 66)

In addition, Rickie's view of himself as an inadequate son, unable to take his dead father's place in his mother's life, taints the marriage from the start. Rickie feels so guilty that he needs to foredoom his efforts to possess the mother. Accordingly, he insists to Agnes, "Never forget that your greatest thing is over. . . . What he [Gerald] gave you then is greater than anything you will get from me" (p. 74).

Although Rickie's marriage to Agnes is a serious error, it need not be a fatal one, for he is offered a second opportunity to claim his authentic self, through the appearance in his life of his half-brother, Stephen. From the first, Rickie recognizes Stephen's importance for him. Even before he knows that Stephen is his brother, he has a vision, while out horseback riding with him. In this vision, he sees himself and Agnes approach the Throne of God, as if to receive a judgment (p. 110). The imagery of this vision, which recalls the imagery of godhead surrounding Gerald in Rickie's mind, clearly links Stephen with Gerald. More importantly, this vision urges Rickie to a confrontation with the father in the image of deity, a confrontation he rejects, along with Stephen, when he abruptly decides to return to Agnes. Rickie later looks back on that scene with Stephen on Salisbury plain as a supreme lost opportunity.

Later, after fainting at learning that Stephen is his brother, Rickie hears Stephen call his name. Hearing it, Rickie not only wakes up but "For one short moment he understood" (p. 130) and is ready to accept Stephen as his brother. Not only does this scene signify some of the magical quality that resides in a name,⁷ but it recalls the fact that it is the

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father who is the giver of the name. In this instance, Stephen calls him by his rightful surname "Elliott," not Rickie, meaning rickety, the name his father had given him out of cruelty. In response, Rickie calls "Stephen," before Agnes runs to restore him to the world of convention, calling "Rickie! Rickie!" (p. 130).

Then Rickie makes one last effort to acknowledge Stephen. He says to Agnes:

"It seems to me that here and there in life we meet with a person or incident that is symbolical. It's nothing in itself, yet for the moment it stands for some eternal principle. We accept it, at whatever cost, and we have accepted life. But if we are frightened and reject it, the moment, so to speak, passes; the symbol is never offered again." (p. 136)

Linking this moment in his mind with the moment in which he beheld Agnes and Gerald, Rickie knows that he must acknowledge his connection with Stephen by telling him they are brothers. Yet he is persuaded by Agnes not to do so. His denial of Stephen is connected with his denial of his father, for, so far as Rickie can know at this point in the narrative, Stephen must be his father's son. As such, Rickie reasons that Stephen must be bad: "There will be no reward . . . from such a man—the son of such a man. But I want to do what is right" (p. 137). Even when offered evidence of Stephen's goodness, as when a woman comes to thank Stephen for rescuing her child from the railroad crossing—Rickie denies it. Paradoxically, by his denial of the father, Rickie ascribes to him greater power than he could ever ordinarily have. He assumes that the father has absolute power to determine the nature of his offspring. Of course, by this reasoning, Rickie himself must also be bad, a conclusion which he simultaneously accepts (as evidenced by his self-hatred) and rejects (by identifying himself only with his mother). Thus, while maintaining that it is "Our duty to acknowledge each man accurately, however vile he is" (p. 137), by failing to apply this principle to Stephen and to his father, Rickie descends into unreality.

Rickie's repeated failures to acknowledge the father are in actuality a rejection in response to rejection. Not only has Rickie's own father been disappointing, but all father figures in the novel prove disappointing, including the ineffectual Tony Failing and the ghostlike Robert. In a sense, the figure of the father seems to split, like figures in dream and folktale, into good father and bad father. But even the good fathers, Tony Failing and Robert, are inaccessible. Good fathers, as well as bad fathers, are conspicuously absent: all are guilty of the ultimate

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abandonment through death of their natural and spiritual children (Rickie, we are told, is Tony Failing's "spiritual heir" [p. 195]).

The narrative makes clear that Rickie cannot accept Stephen until he is ready to do so. By the time that Stephen reappears in his life, Rickie has been prepared to acknowledge him by the failure of his marriage, by the death of his child (which he sees as a proof of the error of his marriage), and by Stephen's vulnerable position (Stephen has been turned out of his aunt's house without any inheritance), for which Rickie is largely responsible. But Rickie wants to accept Stephen on his own terms: he wants Stephen to live in his house and function in his life as a re-embodiment of their mother, as Agnes was to have been. Clearly, the model for Rickie's treatment of Stephen is his mother's childhood treatment of him. Just as he had urged his mother to mold him to her own specifications, saying, "I shall be as wax in your hands" (p. 27), Rickie proposes to mold Stephen by finding him a job, by ensuring his sobriety, and by keeping a watchful eye on him.

But Stephen sees through this offer and refuses it. "I see your game. You don't care about me drinking, or to shake my hand. It's some one else you want to cure—as it were that old photograph [of their mother]" (p. 255). Rickie grants the accuracy of this accusation. "The man was right. He did not love him, even as he had never hated him. In either passion he had degraded him to be a symbol for the vanished past" (p. 255). Stephen then proposes as an alternative that he and Rickie go off together, as men first, brothers second. "Come with me as a man. . . . Not as a brother; who cares what people did years back? We're alive together, and the rest is cant" (p. 257). The relationship that Stephen proposes would be very different from the one Rickie originally envisioned. This friendship would be based upon love, not nostalgia, and upon the acceptance of Stephen as a real person, flaws and all, rather than as an idealization of a dead person.

Rickie tries to enter into a relationship with Stephen on these terms, but he is unequal to it. To do so would mean simultaneously to accept and to move beyond the symbolic figure of the father. It would also mean acknowledging the mother as a real woman, with her own sexual life, as well as symbolically, as the father's sexual partner (whether that of the good father or of the bad father does not matter). Finally, in order to forge this new relationship with Stephen, Rickie would have to give up the incestuous fantasy that Stephen is his own child, the product of his union with his dead mother, a being whom Rickie as the father can mold as he wishes.

Of course, Rickie, who has not consciously acknowledged any of

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these impulses, has great difficulty in this undertaking. In addition, the narrator, by idealizing the description of Rickie's mother and of her lover, Robert, and by desexualizing the narrative of their affair makes it appear not merely difficult but impossible for Rickie to do so. Robert is described in idealized terms, an improbable mixture of farmer and gentleman, who lives so short a time in the narrative and in Mrs. Elliott's life that he need never be socially "placed." Even more tellingly, the narrative avoids looking straight at the sexual relationship of these lovers, as evidenced by the peculiar statement, "They had . . . given him [Stephen] a cloudless spirit—the spirit of the seventeen days in which he was created." To state that a child has been "created" over seventeen days is to deny that he is the product of any single sexual act.

Because Rickie cannot give up the fantasy of possessing the dead mother or the attendant fantasy of returning to her bosom with Stephen as a twin brother, he has no way of claiming his own life, and his muddled journey ends in death. Similarly, because the narrative is undermined by a subtext that parallels Rickie's self-destructive course, it too is doomed to failure. But in its failure as a linear narrative, in its unwillingness to recognize the law of the father as the author of discourse, it raises interesting questions about the nature of narrative itself.

In Forster's introduction, written in 1960 for the Oxford World's Classics edition of *The Longest Journey*, he notes that, in the writing of the novel, "sometimes I went wrong deliberately, as if the spirit of anti-literature had jogged my elbow."⁸ This spirit of anti-literature surfaces most particularly in Forster's overt essay-like criticisms of modern-day culture, whose spiritual center is God the Father, whose social center is marriage, and whose self-justification is the idea of progress.

Forster seeks to dethrone the patriarchal deity of Christianity and to reinstate in His place the nature deities of earlier religions—Demeter, Artemis, and Pan. Forster's primary objection to Christianity is that the law of the Father imposes a strict moral dualism which is too narrow and coercive a guideline for human behavior. Limited by this framework, even the benevolent Mr. Failing condemns the humanly justified and psychologically fulfilling liaison of Mrs. Elliott and her lover. That fixed ideas of good and evil are inadequate as criteria for human behavior is reinforced by the narrator's comment on Rickie: "Rickie suffered from the Primal Curse, which is not—as the Authorized Version suggests—the knowledge of good and evil but of good-and-evil" (p. 171).

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Yet Forster felt great uneasiness and uncertainty in urging the return of the ancient gods, as his many revisions of the novel point out. While earlier drafts include extensive reference to these deities, including an entire chapter which allies Stephen with the god Pan and which shows his illumined outlook on life to result from a panic (from a direct encounter with the nature deity), Forster deleted these passages from later versions of the novel.⁹ In the long run, he rejected so overt an effort to integrate mythic materials into the text. From early on, Forster felt ambivalence about attempting to write what he called "prophetic fiction." On the one hand, he criticized fiction that lacks a sense of mystery.¹⁰ On the other hand, he retained a certain mistrust of fiction that attempts to integrate in a single work actions on different planes. He later expressed this uneasiness in *Aspects of the Novel*, noting the wrecked appearance of even the greatest prophetic novels, including those of Dostoyevski and Lawrence: "The novel through which bardic influence has passed often has a wrecked air, like a drawing-room after an earthquake or a children's party."¹¹

These doubts surface repeatedly in *The Longest Journey*. They are expressed in Rickie's dismissal of his own short story of the supernatural: "But what nonsense! When real things are so wonderful, what is the point of pretending?" (p. 60). They are voiced in Agnes' ironic description of Rickie's literary efforts: "He muddles all day with poetry and old dead people, and then tries to bring it into life. It's too funny for words" (p. 50). They are reflected in Stephen's perplexed amusement at his story about a dryad: "What a production! Who was this girl? . . . The girl was a tree!" (p. 119). Finally, Forster seems to express his own misgivings through the editor who tells Rickie, "Your story does not convince" (p. 143).

Certainly, Forster's diary entry of March 23, 1906, after he had written most of the novel, expresses grave reservations: "Doubt whether novel's any good: all ingenious symbols: little flesh and blood."¹² Despite his longing to revive the old religious symbolism, Forster seems to have anticipated the criticism Lawrence later leveled at him: "Your Pan is a stooping back to the well head, a perverse pushing back the waters to their source, and saying the source is everything. Which is stupid and an annihilation."¹³ At any rate, in a letter of 1907, Forster notes that although he thought the panic chapter "rather jolly," he "soon cut it out."¹⁴ That Forster's misgivings triumphed in his successive revisions suggests that his attitude toward Pan and the other ancient deities was one of nostalgic longing rather than of conviction.

Forster experienced an equally serious dilemma in his desire to

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center his novel on friendship rather than on the traditional subject of marriage. As he stated in a letter of this time, Forster was experiencing increasing difficulty in centering his fiction on the relations between men and women.¹⁵ In *The Longest Journey*, Rickie expresses a similar regret: "he wished there was a society, a kind of friendship office, where the marriage of true minds could be registered" (p. 64). Yet the text reluctantly acknowledges that this wish is confounded by reality: "Abram and Sarai were sorrowful, yet their seed became as sand of the sea, and distracts the politics of Europe at this moment. But a few verses of poetry is all that survives of David and Jonathan" (p. 64). No doubt, Forster abandoned his original plan to have Stephen and Rickie go off together, because he realized that Stephen would have to produce offspring if he was to fulfill the social role the narrative prophesies for him: to guide the future course of England. As Stephen sees his role: "He believed that he guided the future of our race, and that, century after century, his thoughts and his passions would triumph in England" (p. 289).

Surely, this peculiar and unsupported prophecy invites scrutiny. What specifically is to be Stephen's role in guiding England's future? How are he and his heirs to remedy the ills of modern society, so plentifully noted in the text? At first glance, Stephen's role seems to be a return to the land as an individual protest against the dehumanizing movement from countryside to city that the narrative deplores. As the text notes, this movement cityward in search of work and in hope of economic gain has resulted in a loss of connection between people and land, of satisfying labor, and of the sense of community. Stephen's repudiation of this trend seems therefore a worthy rejection of the alienation and triviality of modern life. However, Stephen's return to the land is an option available only to a very few (surely it cannot be what Stephen alludes to as "the future of our race"). This recourse suggests moreover flight and escape rather than moral leadership.

If, contrary to appearances, Stephen's role is not to escape into the idyllic past by living the life of an honest yeoman, perhaps it lies rather in making improvements to alleviate the worst abuses he sees around him. Indeed, the book applauds Stephen's small ameliorations: he has fired a bullying overseer, built cottages for workers and their families, and built a bridge over a dangerous railroad crossing. Yet these seem mere band-aids on the wounds of modern life.

The subtext of the novel seems to point in another direction. While deploring the abuses of capitalism (overdevelopment, pollution, crowding), it is concerned throughout with the right use of money—

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with rightful and wrongful inheritances and with the soul's currency ("Will it really profit us so much if we save our souls and lose the whole world?" [p. 227]). Fittingly, then, the novel concludes with Stephen making a good business deal for the posthumous publication of Rickie's stories. Thus, the narrative suggests that England's salvation lies in the hands of honest and right-minded businessmen such as Mr. Ansell, whose money supports his son, and Stephen, or at least the person he eventually becomes. In other words, Forster seems to place his greatest hopes in men who use their business acumen to support and protect art and intellect. In fact, the narrative seems to indicate that without the support of the shrewd and hardheaded, these enterprises might not survive at all.

In short, Forster's narrative is ambivalent and vacillating in three of its primary concerns. The text seeks to dethrone God the Father and to return to ancient and more inclusive conceptions of deity, yet it lacks commitment to this vision. Secondly, it proposes to place friendship rather than marriage at the center of the narrative; yet the friendship it labors to develop ends in a violent, apparently gratuitous death, which serves to pave the way for a fruitful marriage, whose progeny contain England's future. Finally, it criticizes modern industrial development but applauds the business acumen that has produced it and the worthier products of that money-making talent: the breakdown of class barriers, social amelioration, and the patronage of art and intellect.

The subtext makes equally subversive statements about narrative form as about narrative content. It demonstrates not only a distaste for linear narrative, but a mistrust of literature and of language as well. First, there is a strange indeterminacy about Rickie's fate and course of actions. Rickie suffers a strange series of collapses within the narrative, as if not only does he lose confidence in himself but the author loses confidence in him. Accordingly, right after he fails for the first time to tell Stephen about his parentage, we are told: "The rest of the year was spent by Rickie partly in bed—he had a curious breakdown" (p. 140). After the death of his child: "Henceforward he deteriorates. Let those who censure him suggest what he should do" (p. 193). Later, when Stephen seeks him out, he at first rejects him, but over ten days he experiences a spiritual regeneration—he moves "from disgust to penitence, from penitence to longing, from a life of horror to a new life" (p. 249). He determines to invite Stephen to live with him but, when Stephen refuses and accuses Rickie merely of using him to reincarnate their dead mother, he collapses once again, "heroic no longer" (p. 255). Once more, he bucks up, accepting Stephen's

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offer to take care of him, as they go off together, only to suffer a final collapse. Rickie is like a motor that keeps losing its generator. It is as if Forster is not only indecisive about Rickie's fate but unsure of how much autonomy to give him. Accordingly the action of the narrative veers between being mechanically foreordained and being subject at any moment to reversal of direction.

Second, the most important actions and insights are offered not in the form of event and action but in visions, dreams, and symbolic moments. That is, the novel progresses not by linear narration but by pauses or breaks in the narrative. The most important developments in the novel all take place in this way: Rickie's vision of the lovers Gerald and Agnes; Rickie's incomplete vision while horseback riding with Gerald; Rickie's lucid moment of claiming his brother before he fully returns to consciousness after fainting; Rickie's dream of his dead mother reassuring him after the death of his child; and, most importantly, Rickie and Stephen seeing their friendship affirmed in the arch of the flame boats on the water.

Finally, the narrative shows a profound distrust of books and a strong preference for gesture over language. All three characters who author books are unsuccessful in their lifetimes: Ansell's dissertation is twice rejected at Cambridge; Mr. Failing's socialist experiments are unsuccessful during his lifetime and his book is published only posthumously, through his wife's efforts, accompanied by her introduction; and Rickie's stories are rejected during his lifetime and achieve success only after posthumous publication. In general, the novel argues for the supremacy of life over art. Rickie's dryad story is left to weather outdoors as Stephen falls into a delicious nap in the sun; and Mr. Failing's book is battered when it is used as the weapon in a playful fight between Ansell and Stephen.¹⁶

In sum, much of the fascination of *The Longest Journey* lies in the ways it undermines its own narrative statements and structures. It criticizes the traditional concerns of the novel—its emphasis on realistic social situations in a postindustrial society; its central treatment of marriage; and its code of values, based on patriarchal moral and religious assumptions. The circular structure and symbolism of the novel are therefore most appropriate. The circle signifies both implosion and expansion. In a sense the novel implodes. The protagonist, permanently paralyzed and muddled, moves in circles, repeating his own history until his death. Recording his fate, the narrative collapses upon itself. Although critical of both the conventional concerns and forms of narrative, the novel fails in its efforts to

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establish new ones. But, by raising fundamental questions about the nature and limitations of fiction, the novel, like many of its symbols, opens out in ever widening circles of concentric meaning.

¹ These ideas, fully presented in Jacques Lacan's *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), are neatly summarized in Robert Con Davis, "Critical Introduction: The Discourse of the Father," in *The Fictional Father*, ed. Robert Con Davis (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1981), pp. 21-23.

² E. M. Forster, "Author's Introduction," *The Longest Journey*, ed. Elizabeth Heine, Abinger 2 (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), lxvi.

³ The entire passage reads:

I never was attached to that great sect
Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
To cold oblivion, though it is in the code
Of modern morals, and the beaten road
Which those poor slaves with weary footsteps tread,
Who travel to their home among the dead
By the broad highway of the world, and so
With one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe,
The dreariest and the longest journey go.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Epipsychidion," *Selected Poetry*, ed. Neville Rogers (Boston: Houghton, 1968), p. 246.

⁴ E. M. Forster, *The Longest Journey*, ed. Elizabeth Heine, Abinger 2 (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), p. 289. Subsequent references are to this edition, with page numbers cited parenthetically in the text.

⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 41, 127.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, "A Case of Hysteria," in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, 7 (London: Hogarth, 1964), pp. 79-80. See also "Three Essays on Sexuality," pp. 196, 226.

⁷ In a note on the text, the editor, Elizabeth Heine, comments: "Forster implies the almost magical power of personal names when Harold remembers his own at the sight of the Rings (p. 336) and when Agnes calls Rickie's name from the dell (p. 73) and in the Rings, when he is about to acknowledge Stephen as his brother" (p. 130). The mother's lack of a Christian name links her more directly to the ancient powers of the earth (*The Longest Journey*, p. 434).

⁸ Forster, "Author's Introduction," p. lxvi.

⁹ "Appendix C," in *The Longest Journey*, Abinger Edition, pp. 331-38.

¹⁰ Forster remained remarkably consistent in his literary opinions, as evidenced by a comparison of the views he expressed in his tripos essay, written in 1899, and those in the Clark lectures which he delivered in 1927, later published as *Aspects of the Novel*. A pertinent passage from the tripos essay occurs in his discussion of Fielding as a novelist: "he wrote great books—but not the greatest books; he was too cozy and comfortable in his wayside parlours and

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stage coaches to wander out into the unknown country." Autograph manuscript of English essay, "The Novelists of the Eighteenth Century and Their Influence on Those of the Nineteenth," E. M. Forster Papers, King's College, Cambridge. Permission to cite this unpublished material was granted by the Society of Authors on behalf of King's College, Cambridge.

¹¹ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, 1955), p. 125.

¹² Heine, "Editor's Introduction," *The Longest Journey*, xiv.

¹³ D. H. Lawrence to E. M. Forster, 3 Feb. 1915, Forster Papers, King's College, Cambridge. Permission to cite this unpublished material was granted by Lawrence Pollinger Ltd., the estate of Mrs. Frieda Lawrence Ravagli, and Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴ Forster quoted in Heine, "Editor's Introduction," *The Longest Journey*, p. li.

¹⁵ In his June 16, 1911, diary entry, Forster states that he feels "weariness of the only subject that I both can and may treat—the love of men for women & vice versa." Quoted by P. N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life* (New York: Harcourt, 1978), I, 199.

¹⁶ As a reviewer of this article pointed out, these episodes are prefigured in an occurrence in "Ansell," one of Forster's early stories, published posthumously in *The Life to Come*. In "Ansell," a bookish, frail university student reenounters, on vacation at his cousin's estate, his childhood friend, Ansell, a sturdy, uneducated youth, now a gardener and gamekeeper. Inadvertently, Ansell drops the scholar's books into a ravine. Their loss proves to be the student's salvation: unable to complete his dissertation and to return to his dry university existence, he abandons himself to the physical pleasures of the outdoor life in the company of his robust friend. See *The Life to Come* (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), pp. 1–9.

Reflecting Vision in *The House of Mirth*

ROSLYN DIXON

When Edith Wharton outlines her theory on point of view in *The Writing of Fiction*, she also provides the key to the narrative structure in her novels:

In the interest of . . . unity it is best to . . . let the tale work itself out from not more than two (or at most three) angles of vision, choosing as reflecting consciousnesses persons either in close mental or moral relation to each other, or discerning enough to estimate each other's parts in the drama, so that the latter, even viewed from different angles, always presents itself to the reader as a whole.¹

This statement points directly to the source of ambiguity in *The House of Mirth*: the use of multiple points of view. Wharton believed that the individual exists only in relation to a complex and demanding social structure, one that allows little variance from convention. For this reason, any meaning in the protagonist's plight arises only through the interplay of characters and from the totality of the drama. Moreover, no one character embodies exemplary behavior, nor is there a central consciousness to provide a moral center or touchstone.² Wharton's decision to use contrasting angles of vision marks her move away from the "great tradition" in literature and toward modernism.

This technique is an embodiment of Wharton's ideological perspective concerning the role of the individual within society specifically, and in relation to her vision of America generally. As an uncommitted member of her own community, she understood the insidious pressures put on the individual to conform; as a voracious student of the "wonderworld of nineteenth-century science" and French scholarship,³ she was exposed to the empirical studies emanating from the nascent social sciences in Europe. In Herbert

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Spencer and Émile Durkheim, Wharton found theories to explain social phenomena and her own ambiguous response to her social role. Understanding these influences on Wharton's intellectual development clarifies many of the troubling ambiguities critics continue to see in Wharton's fiction, as does analyzing her use of narrative, for the two are closely intertwined.

In a sense, Wharton's novels are empirical studies of the workings of society, presented through contrasting angles of vision—"reflecting consciousnesses"—that amalgamate to form comprehensive, and unsentimental, sociological assessments. In *The House of Mirth*, turn-of-the-century New York modifies as Lily Bart moves downward, but the community always is presented as an unthinking, powerful adversary perpetuating specific standards of behavior. And like all of Wharton's protagonists, Lily is an active, albeit somewhat disconnected, participant: her expedient actions reveal her commitment to common values. At the same time, Lily has a latent personal quality that is stimulated when another uncommitted participant, Lawrence Selden, exerts sufficient influence to provide a compelling alternative. The interplay between Lily, Selden, and society at large creates the "reflecting angles of vision"; the nucleus of the novel is formed by Lily's struggle to reconcile her spiritual needs as they are embodied by Selden, with her material and social needs as they are embodied by the group.

The drama created by this interplay is based in part on Wharton's understanding of sociological theory, but she adds another dimension by evaluating the philosophical tools available to Lily within this social framework. And as becomes apparent, the moral directives are of little use, thereby revealing that society at large does not follow its supposed ethical norms; ultimately, Wharton undermines the assumption that positive moral values provide the foundation of civilized society. Hence, Wharton's subject is morality, although she tackles it in a way critics have not yet addressed.

Part of the reason for this lapse is that critics apply their own ideological or moral expectations to Wharton, and in ways not always appropriate. Moreover, many critical assumptions have unjustifiably withstood the test of time to provide unquestioned givens; critics even become the defenders of those moral assumptions which she evaluates so unsentimentally. But Wharton clearly sees the limitations for the individual who accepts the conventional beliefs of the human community, especially in relation to the struggle for personal fulfillment. She uses narrative structure to show how the parts fit into the whole, undecorated either with platitudes or with simple solutions.

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Because Wharton's purpose is to evaluate the underlying ethical and social framework of American society, she creates in Lily Bart a character on the brink of a crucial choice. Lily's intelligence and social acumen are recognized by a society appreciative of good breeding and wit, but such qualities are less important than economic power and social viability, which she lacks. She maintains her somewhat precarious position by trading social obligations for material comforts, a role she perpetuates by capitalizing on her physical attributes: "If I were shabby no one would have me; a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. . . . Who wants a dingy woman?"⁴ She understands her value, and she knows how to sell it at the highest possible price. As an aging ingenue, however, she needs more security: "The certainty that she could marry Percy Gryce when she pleased had lifted a heavy load from her mind . . ." (p. 770). She commits herself to a marriage of convenience because that is the expedient choice, and one that fulfills her social and economic needs.

At the same time, Lily has an attraction to the romantic, embodied in Lawrence Selden, who provides an ethical perspective on Lily's expedient decision. Selden offers Lily a more compelling alternative by defining success as personal freedom, freedom "from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from all the material accidents. To keep a kind of republic of the spirit" (p. 105). Typically male, Selden finds Lily "diverting" (p. 5), "exquisite" (p. 7) but, untypically, he questions her value: "was it not possible that the material was fine, but that circumstances had fashioned it into a futile shape?" (p. 7). Whereas Lily unquestioningly accepts the female standard, Selden in contrast questions what merit those standards have and, in the broader sense, what purpose such standards serve. Selden establishes principles which bear no relation to Lily's situation, then, but he does provide a valid ethical perspective on the female role and on the marriage market in this community.

Lily's response to Selden reveals the nature of her conflict. Because she has a "faculty to adapting herself, for entering into other people's feelings . . ." (p. 84), she begins to assess her social group by Selden's perspective:

Lily smiled at her classification of her friends. How differently they had seemed to her a few hours ago! Then they had symbolized what she was gaining, now they stood for what she was giving up. That very afternoon, they had seemed full of brilliant qualities; now she saw that they were merely dull in a

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loud way. Under the glitter of their opportunities she saw the poverty of their achievement. (p. 88)

Those elements that Lily had defined as crucial to her emotional well-being become irrelevant when she perceives according to Selden's standard. Consequently, when Selden adds a dimension to Lily's life she thought not possible, she instinctually turns away from the proposed marriage. While she glories in her spiritual growth, however, her social position remains precarious: "There were in her at the moment two beings, one drawing deep breaths of freedom and exhilaration, the other gasping for air in a little black prison-house of fears" (p. 102). She must resolve somehow the contradiction between her spiritual aspirations and her financial needs by herself, but against Selden's standard, a dilemma Lily recognizes is irreconcilable.

In a sense, Selden represents Platonic ideals, while Lily embodies sociological phenomena. Compare Lily's dilemma with Durkheim's 1893 commentary:

There are in each of us . . . two consciences: one which is common to our group in its entirety, which, consequently, is not ourself, but society living and acting within us; the other, on the contrary, represents that in us which is personal and distinct, that which makes us an individual.⁵

Selden thus brings to the surface what Lily kept suppressed by virtue of her involvement in the group. Selden on the other hand does not follow his own philosophy, which Lily points out, and which he rationalizes: "I have tried to remain amphibious: it's all right as long as one's lungs can work in another air" (p. 111). In his desire to assess her value, in "putting her skill to the test" (p. 4), he encourages her escape from the conventional, but he does not provide any practical assistance or emotional commitment, as Lily points out: "you're so sure of me that you can amuse yourself with experiments" (p. 116). Selden thus remains sufficiently detached from Lily to absolve himself of any responsibility. In this way, Lily's proposed marriage to Percy Gryce provides the vehicle to test social dynamics in response to Selden's objective philosophic rhetoric.

Lily and Selden provide the predominant angles of vision; the other angle of vision is provided by society at large. The momentum in this community occurs in the constant realignment of loyalties based on power struggles erupting beneath a decorous surface, only ruffled by occasional indiscretions. Judy Trenor, one of the ruling denizens, counterpoints Selden with pragmatic sensibility; she has ensured her own social and economic success through a loveless marriage (p. 129),

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and she is exasperated by Lily's rejection of Percy Gryce. Mrs. Trenor knows that luxury exchanged for marriage vows is fair value, a view Lily herself understands: "It was the voice of [Lily's] own conscience which spoke to her through Mrs. Trenor's reproachful accents" (p. 120).

The commitment to exchange revealed by Mrs. Trenor is echoed constantly, and provides a guideline for addressing the constantly shifting power struggles and loyalties, as Wai-Chee Demock has recently pointed out.⁶ And, as is apparent, this framework is a viable one; the shared, commonly accepted values relate to survival and, most importantly, to the achievement and maintenance of power. Moreover, this society seems to exist quite comfortably without an ethical standard and, in fact, seems quite oblivious to its lack. In Spencerian terms, however, this is not contradictory: "Rude superstitions initiate elaborate mythologies, theologies, cosmogonies. Opinions getting embodied in creeds, gets [sic] embodied, too, in accepted codes of ceremony and conduct, and in established social sentiment."⁷ In sociological terms, any "superstitions" or "opinions" can provide a viable code of conduct, so long as these beliefs stem from commonly held assumptions and provide an identifiable standard to follow.

Wharton's presumption that Christian values do not inform the social framework may be a reflection of her agnosticism, but more likely she is revealing her perceptions about American society. She more properly understands social dynamics in Darwinian terms,⁸ and she accepts the inherent contradiction between conventional moral assumptions and actual social practices. What does interest her, and what provides the central focus in the novel, is the struggle experienced by those who do not unquestioningly comply with New York's social code. Lily's error is not that she participates in the various exchanges, for that is the route to survival. But under Selden's influence, she becomes hesitant and inconsistent, a parasite rather than a committed and equal participant in the game of life.

Wharton does acknowledge, however, the presence of orthodox values in Gerty Farish and Aunt Peniston. "Good" in the Christian sense, Gerty is "a parasite on the moral order . . ." (p. 241), leading a minimal existence and capable only of vocal outrage and meaningless suggestions: "Miss Farish could see no hope for her friend but in a life completely reorganized and detached from its old associations . . ." (p. 432). Gerty reveals what life offers according to Selden's criteria in the "republic of the spirit," devoid of glamor and frivolity, but, ironically, Gerty also lacks the vitality that makes Lily so compelling to Selden. In Gerty, then, the limitations in Selden's perspective become evident.

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While Gerty has so sacrificed herself to become ineffectual, in contrast, Aunt Peniston's appearance of moral rectitude overshadows genuine compassion. She is dedicated to empty ritual and moral platitudes, a "looker-on at life" (p. 58), who has never tested the beliefs she advocates. Her rigorous dedication to form and her lack of charity make her a dangerous adversary; when she disinherits Lily, Mrs. Peniston embodies the belief that moral lessons are learned only through sacrifice, although she fails to consider the serious consequences for Lily, who thereby is cast completely adrift. Gerty and Aunt Peniston thus provide contrasting perspectives: Aunt Peniston is form without substance, Gerty substance without viable form. Both are, however, in their own ways as self-serving as everyone in this society.

In the same way, Selden also reveals he is a self-serving, albeit sporadic, participant. His condemnation of Lily's apparent liaison with Gus Trenor contrasts with Selden's own liaison with Mrs. Dorset; Selden's actions are condoned, however, while Lily's are condemned. By turning against Lily at this and other crucial instances, Selden reveals his duplicitous nature. He spouts ideals, but his words become empty rhetoric in the face of his own actions. Selden thereby suggests that the aesthetic ideal is subject to capriciousness and to expedient compromise. In this sense, Selden provides an example of Darwinian adaptation: he restricts his need for a philosophical framework to the abstract; he becomes variously conventional, hypocritical, and expedient as necessary, which he justifies in terms of his "amphibious" nature.⁹

Selden has long caused problems for critics. Diana Trilling's 1947 commentary is worth considering in particular for its curious rationale. She feels there are echoes of James

in Selden's moral elevation and in the inviolability with which he inhabits an insensible world. . . . Selden argues the thesis that is . . . made explicit in his choice of a manner of life, that mind and grace of spirit reach their best flower in a well-ordered society, sheltered against the rude winds that blow through a more open world.¹⁰

For Trilling, Selden embodies the moral "thesis" in the novel, which she substantiates by concluding that his "passions are blocked," and that he reasonably takes Lily's actions as "gross rejection" until she ultimately proves her worth in death. Hence, Trilling shifts responsibility onto Lily to carry not only her own actions, but also Selden's inaction; Trilling thereby appoints Selden as the exemplar without demanding that he be exemplary.

Unfortunately, Trilling's rationale is typical, and is used, ironically,

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to illustrate Wharton's literary shortcomings. In 1953, Blake Nevius suggests that "it was beyond Edith Wharton's powers of sympathy and imagination to create in Gerty or in Selden attractive alternatives."¹¹ In fact, Nevius' whole study is actually an insidiously biased evaluation, reflecting a view going as far back as E. K. Brown, V. L. Parrington, and Percy Lubbock, all of whom try to locate Wharton unsuccessfully within the "great tradition." One typical example from Lubbock: "There is a curious lack of anything [in the novels] that could be disengaged as a philosophy of life, a characteristic synthesis of belief [which] is no doubt their weakness from one point of view."¹² In their unsuccessful search for a moral touchstone, critics often reveal more about their own unfulfilled expectations than about Wharton's perspective. And their analyses often become, ironically, self-fulfilling prophecies used to legitimize those expectations.

While the early critics expected Wharton to comply with certain moral standards they themselves espoused, later critics generally have downplayed the moral implications in favor of other issues. But Wharton's subject clearly is morality: if Selden's adaptable idealism counterpoints society's blatant opportunism, then Lily reveals the danger in acting on Selden's principles. Under his influence, she becomes enmeshed in a series of irreconcilable social and spiritual crises. She continuously loses sight of the common rules of conduct until, finally, she is ejected from her social group; those skills which ensured her survival become useless in a world with different rules: "The environment in which Lily found herself was as strange to her as its inhabitants. She was acquainted with the world of the fashionable New York hotel" (p. 441). Her downward spiral continues until she is left with only one option: to act on Rosedale's advice to bargain with Selden's letters to reestablish her position in society.

The perspective provided by Rosedale is crucial, as his social rise parallels Lily's decline. Rosedale correctly assumes that exchange and power politics provide the basis for all relationships. He uses Gus Trenor as an entrance into society in exchange for assisting Trenor with the stock market (p. 130). When marriage to Lily seems beneficial, he so negotiates; when she no longer is useful, he arbitrarily rejects her. Rosedale is a survivor cognizant not only of the rules, but also of the most productive strategies. He shows Lily how to survive, thereby echoing the sentiments Lily herself embodied when she was within and he was without. This reversal of roles reveals how crucial is expedient self-interest. More importantly, Rosedale's consistency of purpose contrasts with Lily's inconsistency.

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But for Lily to act on Rosedale's advice would compromise Selden. As genuine as Lily's affection is for Selden, more significantly, he epitomizes the ideal to which she aspires. Regardless of his culpability, crushing Selden to ensure her own survival would be tantamount to crushing the ideal. Hence, Lily's choices are reduced to absolutes: she can survive by compromising the ideal, or she can honor the ideal by sacrificing herself. In choosing to protect Selden, Lily seems to reveal inner growth: she follows the morally correct path.

Many critics maintain that Lily experiences a fortunate fall. Irving Howe suggests that "only dimly, and then after much pain and confusion, does [Lily] realize that this social fall may have positive moral consequences. . . ." ¹³ Geoffrey Walton concludes that "it is [Lily's] steadily deepening self-awareness of social perceptiveness which, along with her fundamental moral integrity and dignity, give her ultimately her tragic stature." ¹⁴ And more recently, Carol Wershoven suggests that "as the distance between Selden and Lily widens . . . Lily develops her own moral strength. . . . She burns those letters, which are the key to her social rehabilitation." ¹⁵

But Lily, in fact, does not grow; she consistently acts according to her nature. The impulse to set herself apart from the "herd of her sex" is the same instinct that takes her imprudently to Selden's apartment: just as her physical needs require that she make herself desirable, so her spiritual needs draw her to Selden. And buying clothes when she should husband her meager resources stems from the same impulse as donating to Gerty's charities: "The satisfaction derived from this act was all that the most ardent moralist could have desired" (p. 180). Her acts of self-indulgence are as integral as her acts of charity, and stem from the same sensibility, a quality Selden clearly articulates: "your genius lies in converting impulses into intentions" (p. 107). Lily acts on equally ethical or selfish impulses, a characteristic that pointedly undermines any suggestion of moral growth.

Instead, her choice only reveals Selden's weakness. He offers empty rhetoric, harsh judgments, and a vision of life completely disconnected from the exigencies of her situation. He condemns Lily even in death for the appearance of compromise (p. 531); his final comment only points to his egocentricity: "It was this moment of love, this fleeting victory over themselves, which had kept them from atrophy and extinction" (p. 532). He fails to understand that Lily, removed from everything that enriched her life, has, in fact, atrophied. Moreover, in death, she becomes extinct, not an exemplar of the ideal, but as a pathetic victim of useless ethics. When Selden gives to Lily's corpse "the

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word which made all clear" (p. 533), she cannot hear and he does not understand, and the word becomes as meaningless as Lily's life. And herein lies the answer to Selden's inquiry regarding Lily's worth.

What then are the implications? From Selden's perspective, the experiment is a success. He establishes himself as a spectator, and he is consistent with that aim. He also is consistent as moral instructor to Lily, which allows him to test not only his theoretical beliefs, but to evaluate Lily's worth in relation to those beliefs. And in his terms, Lily ultimately fulfills his expectations: by complying with his principles, she proves her value to him, dying as an admirable example of noble self-sacrifice.

From the perspective of society at large, everyone illustrates that social survival depends only on fair exchange for services rendered; they thereby illustrate that exemplary behavior or living by ethical ideals is not possible in actual situations. When Lily asks Rosedale whether truth alters a situation, he replies that "it does in novels, but I'm certain it don't in real life" (p. 412). Whereas Selden fails to acknowledge that philosophical theories are potentially destructive in practice, then, Rosedale has a much more realistic perspective and, as a result, does not share Selden's hypocrisy.

From Lily's perspective, the options available to her are so contradictory that she is forced to compromise on issues striking at the center of her emotional well-being. To suggest that Lily's expectations are unreasonable, as critics have,¹⁶ is irrelevant, for Lily aspires to the common social goals. To suggest that Lily's spiritual aspirations are worthy, however, proves equally implausible. Rather, the implications become apparent as she vacillates, drifting toward her own destruction:

That was the feeling which possessed her now—the feeling of being something rootless and ephemeral, mere spin-drift on the whirling surface of existence. . . . Her parents too had been rootless, blown hither and thither on every wind of fashion, without any personal existence. . . . There was no center of early pieties, of grave enduring traditions, to which her heart could revert and from which it could draw strength for itself and tenderness for others. (pp. 515–16)

Lily ultimately realizes that there is neither a moral center to society, nor in herself. In this crucial insight into the genesis of her own moral weakness, Lily sees how ill-equipped everyone, herself included, is to address the moral dilemmas of life.

Cynthia Griffin Wolff disagrees: "As inhabitants of *The House of Mourning*, [Nettie and her baby] give a moral focus to the satire. Lily's powerful identification with the baby gives silent testimony to the

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infantilizing force of the mutilating image of women that society fosters."¹⁷ Yet Lily's suicide suggests something more: whereas Nettie survives by inhabiting *The House of Mourning*, Lily cannot similarly compromise; she is disconnected from those values that inform Nettie's meager existence. But neither can Lily commit herself to *The House of Mirth*; she is equally disconnected from society's serious frivolity. Because she is neither morally corrupt, nor morally renewed, she has no place in either House. Her identification with the baby more likely symbolizes her desire to be born again, in a new form, in a different place, a different time, with different values. Hence, Lily finally chooses to opt out. Consequently, no one provides the moral touchstone necessary to make Lily's suffering meaningful.

Although this omission usually is seen by critics as a technical or artistic flaw, Wharton in fact chooses to omit a moral center. Rather than presenting an ideal, she reveals the actual from every angle, evaluating and reevaluating it within a constantly shifting perspective. Meaning thus is formulated in the accumulation of focus and contrast, action and response, choice and consequence, a point Wharton reinforces elsewhere: "I am never interested in the misfortunes of my personages, only in their psychological evolution."¹⁸ In this way, form points to meaning: each character becomes a component in and subservient to the whole; the "whole" reveals the implications. Most significantly, this technique undermines the foundations of certain assumptions, not related specifically to women, but to the ethical framework presumed to inform society.

Wharton creates a world without moral positives because she sees in America a society without moral positives, a society lacking the kind of ethical foundation that would give meaning to Lily's struggle. In this sense, she brings a modernist perspective to her fiction. More from Durkheim:

We cannot at one and the same time develop ourselves in two opposite senses. If we have a lively desire to think and act for ourselves, we cannot be strongly inclined to think and act as others do. . . . Moreover, at the moment when this solidarity exercises its force, our personality vanishes . . . for we are no longer ourselves, but the collective life.¹⁹

Despite Lily's spiritual disconnection from New York society, as a member of that society, she is incapable of significantly modifying her behavior. In this way, Lily's tragedy is individuated, but her evolution also provides the vehicle for a sociological assessment of a society

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lacking in moral foundation, one that, by its very nature, is incapable of moral growth.

Wharton's ideological perspective suggests that she is less connected with the "Great Tradition" in literature than she is connected with the modern French tradition leading to structuralism. In the evolution of character, she conducts an empirical assessment of the "whole" by applying Durkheim's principles; like the moderns, Wharton perceives society as devoid of values and dedicated to self-gratification. And like the moderns, Sartre for instance, Wharton perceives choice as the only avenue to selfhood, although, paradoxically, choice also leads, as in Lily Bart's case, to self-destruction. By using "reflecting angles of vision," Wharton creates a text, like society, lacking a moral center. And, as in society, the implications in the text ultimately must speak for themselves. That critics have for so long misunderstood Wharton illustrates how narrow the critical boundaries can become when writers fail to fulfill reader expectations or to conform with conventional techniques.

¹ Edith Wharton, *The Writing of Fiction* (London: Scribner's, 1925), pp. 87-88.

² In *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), Cynthia Griffin Wolff points to the lack of a moral center in her discussion of *The Custom of the Country* (p. 232), a characteristic applicable to all of Wharton's fiction.

³ Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: Scribner's, 1895), p. 94.

⁴ Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (New York: Scribner's, 1905), pp. 17-18). All further references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

⁵ Émile Durkheim, "On Mechanical and Organic Solidarity," in *Theories of Society*, Talcott Parsons, et al., eds. (New York: Free Press, 1961), p. 212.

⁶ Wai-Chee Demock, "Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*," in *PMLA*, 100, No. 5 (Oct. 1985), 783-91.

⁷ Herbert Spencer, "The Factors of Social Phenomena," in Parsons, et al., *Theories of Society*, p. 1023.

⁸ In "Psychological Determinism in *The Age of Innocence*," James A. Robinson connects Wharton's terminology with Darwinism and determinism [*The Markham Review*, V (Fall, 1975), 1-15].

⁹ Wolff notes Selden's contradictory nature, but offers a feminist interpretation (*A Feast of Words*, p. 121).

¹⁰ Diana Trilling, "The House of Mirth Revisited," in *Edith Wharton: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Irving Howe, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 113.

¹¹ Blake Nevius, *Edith Wharton* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1961), p. 59.

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¹² Percy Lubbock, "The Novels of Edith Wharton," in Howe, ed., *A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 60.

¹³ Irving Howe, "A Reading of *The House of Mirth*," *ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Walton, *Edith Wharton: A Critical Interpretation* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1970), p. 61.

¹⁵ Carol Wershoven, *The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton* (East Brunswick, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1982), p. 52.

¹⁶ Diana Trilling, for instance, suggests that Wharton should have provided "employment for Lily—as, say, a governess or companion" ("*The House of Mirth* Revisited," p. 117).

¹⁷ Wolff, *A Feast of Words*, p. 130.

¹⁸ Quoted in R. W. B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (New York: Harper, 1975), pp. 325–26.

¹⁹ Durkheim, "On Mechanical and Organic Solidarity," p. 212.

John Cheever's Surreal Vision and the Bridge of Language

WAYNE STENGEL

The 1984 publication of Susan Cheever's *Home before Dark*, a memoir by John Cheever's novelist daughter about Cheever's thirty-year struggle with alcoholism and bisexuality, reveals Cheever to be anything but a glib writer of *New Yorker* short stories of manners. In *Home before Dark*, Cheever emerges as a consistently brooding surrealist, a writer whose novels and stories frequently return to images of exile, family discord, and disruptive travel. The sense of displacement that these situations evokes haunted Cheever throughout his career. His writing therefore becomes the effort to bridge the gap, lessen the abyss between appearance and reality in both the world he recorded and the life he lived. As Susan Cheever quotes from the journal her father kept from the early 1930s until his death in 1982: "The bridge of language, metaphor, anecdote, and imagination that I build each morning to cross the incongruities in my life seems very frail indeed."¹ Accordingly, the sense of psychological disorientation that plagued Cheever in the last five years of his life permeates all his art. This quality makes Cheever a master of fragmentary, anecdotal short stories and, for some critics, an unsatisfactory shaper of novelistic continuity and *durée*.

However, just this sense of obsolescence and disarray in the midst of the seemingly familiar, affluent, and secure creates the collage effect of much of Cheever's fiction. It also gives his writing as many affinities to postmodernism as to the more realistic milieu of an Updike or an Auchincloss. Moreover, *Home before Dark* should enable his audience to see Cheever as an unfailingly surreal lyricist of disorientation, a writer whose fictions are propelled by a perpetual sense of fear. Similarly, Cheever's joyous ecstasy in the physical world can be extinguished as quickly as a candle flame.

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As Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., and Frederick Bracher have demonstrated,² of all John Cheever's more than 100 short stories no single tale so closely reveals his point of view and philosophy of composition as "A Vision of the World," first collected in *The Brigadier and the Golf Widow* in 1964. With this story, written in midcareer, Cheever literalizes the compunction he feels to bridge the gap. Here he creates a chain, arch, or bridge—and these are the words Cheever uses again and again in his fiction—between an absurdly affluent world of material possessions and the unsettling yet unifying force of his dreams. By midcentury, Cheever was convinced that the quotidian, grotesque realities of American life had grown uniformly hostile and threatening. In the nature of dream experience, he felt, lay the meaning and explanation for the grating disjunctures and incongruities of middle-class suburban life.

Any reader intrigued by Cheever's thought and writing can find repeated instances of his metaphoric use of the concept of the chain, arch, or link. This structuring device bridges the distance between the increasingly horrifying American nightmare and an idealized, seemingly Jungian dreamworld of archetypes, doubles, light and shadows, personae, and masks. Cheever believed this realm might give individual lives a vision of completeness and transcendence. In describing the shaping of his fiction to Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in 1969, Cheever said: "It's almost like shaping a dream . . . to give precisely the concord you want . . . the arch, really. It's almost the form of an arch."³ Or as R. G. Collins interprets Cheever's remark: "It seems an accurate description of Cheever's view of successful fiction, a dream that becomes an arch tying together the universe of the inner being."⁴ However, when one begins to explore the implications of this linkage, a reader is surprised at how thoroughly the metaphor runs through Cheever's writing. Nonetheless, Cheever's protagonists have enormous difficulty in making these bridges connect their dream visions with reality.

"A Vision of the World" develops more like a transcendental essay by Emerson or Thoreau than a contemporary short story. The narrator, a suburban lord of the manor—much like Cheever in Ossining—describes a series of random events that frustrates all of his efforts to make order or purpose of his world. The absurd cha-cha musak that blares over the delicatessen counter of his neighborhood grocery induces the homely woman in front of him into his arms for a fleeting pas de deux. Gardening in his backyard, the narrator discovers a copperhead molting from its winter skin and suddenly experiences a prescience of the evil that his suburban enclave so wants to deny.

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Nearby, the narrator unearths a long-buried shoe-polish can containing a twenty-year-old note from a young social climber asserting that he will hang himself if he is not a member of the Gory Brook Country Club by the time he is twenty-five. Apprehensively, the narrator wonders how to make sense of this increasingly meaningless world. Interestingly, it is his wife, the dream-conscious, feminine principle who offers a solution:

But I was grateful to my wife then for what she had said, for stating that the externals of her life had the quality of a dream. The uninhibited energies of the imagination had created the supermarket, the viper, and the note in the shoe-polish can. Compared to these, my wildest reveries had the literalness of double-entry bookkeeping. It pleased me to think that our external life has the quality of a dream and that in our dreams we find the virtues of conservatism.⁵

With the aid of the feminine imagination, the narrator suddenly understands how to interpret reality so as to make it less threatening and distorted. If the human imagination finds Sixties' suburban life bizarre and disorienting, that same imagination can be used to interpret those qualities of the narrator's dreams that suggest harmony, security, and triumph. Suddenly, the protagonist discovers a narrative method which will generate the events of the story to come while reconstructing the chain of situations through which the tale has evolved. The narrator will use imagination and language to describe not a bridge of events, but that essence of his dreams which suggests wholeness and harmony in a deeply fragmented world.

What I wanted to identify then was not a chain of facts but an essence—something like that indecipherable collision of contingencies that can produce exaltation or despair. What I wanted to do was to grant my dreams, in so incoherent a world, their legitimacy. (p. 607)

Many of Cheever's narrators use their imaginations and speech as mediation between senseless reality and an ironically coherent dreamworld. This process involves them in two immediate problems. First, the arch, bridge, or chain that is the Cheever protagonist's device for conveying the quality of dream may convey situations and plot, but it is grossly inadequate to reproduce the texture and essence of dream. These Jacob's ladders fall before even the most superficial Jungian analysis. Secondly, the language—gesture, intonation, and semiotic—of the dream state is hardly the articulated speech of contemporary Westchester. Therefore Cheever's narrators are always confronted with

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the dilemma of translating the speech and thoughts of dream into the language of surreal Bullet Park. Thus the Cheever protagonist desperately clings to his bridges and wants to destroy them; he or she desires passage between dream and debilitating reality while sensing that no means of satisfactory translation may ever be attainable.

Nonetheless, this narrator doggedly pursues his tranquilizing dreams and his effort to translate them into tormenting reality. The protagonist of "A Vision of the World" first dreams of arriving with a group of men on a desert island and of mastering the difficult language of this world while ordering a meal in a restaurant. He next dreams of seeing a priest or bishop walking along the edge of a seashore and of being greeted by this holy man with the same sentence of this arcane language he used earlier in the restaurant. Finally, he dreams of playing on the winning team in a touch football game. Consistently, his wife and daughter, and the wives and daughters of the other team members who have formed a cheerleading squad for the players, hail their fathers and husbands with the same cheering phrase. "Porpozec ciebie nie prosze dorzanin albo zyolpocz ciwego" (p. 688), says the narrator to the waiter, the priest to the narrator, and the cheerleaders to the players. Like many Cheever stories, this repeated speech act is a linguistic attempt to carry the secure, unifying nature of dream to the discordant collage of middle-class American experience.

Typically, the Cheever protagonist can maintain a shaky equilibrium between dream essence and the baroque, discontinuous dreamland of American life as long as this narrator restricts his dreams and their uncommunicative language to his own consciousness. When these individuals strive, as Cheever the writer did daily, to bridge the gap between individual dream and desperate American dreamland, disaster ensues. Emotional breakdown, or *cafard*, that compulsive sense of dread that inflicts so many of Cheever's protagonists, results. In "A Vision of the World" this apocalyptic moment occurs when the narrator enters his wife's kitchen, a dreamland of "pink, washable walls, chilling lights, built-in television (where prayers were being said), and artificial potted plants" (p. 610). Fresh from his dream of being on the winning side of the football game, the narrator writes his breakfast order on the tablet the family reserves for their mealtime transcriptions. Without hesitation, the narrator writes, "Porpozec ciebie nie prosze dorzanin albo zyolpocz ciwego." Amused, then concerned, his wife asks him what these words mean. The protagonist responds by repeating the phrase over and over again. Immediately, his wife calls for help. The family doctor arrives and gives the narrator a sedative. Within hours, the

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narrator takes an afternoon plane to Florida to recuperate from nervous exhaustion.

Inevitably, dreams and dreamland pursue the protagonist to Florida. There the narrator transfers his frustration with his wife to a dream of a beautiful, alluring woman kneeling in a field of wheat. He recounts this dream in language that attempts to evoke the comfort of his dreams while bridging the gap between confusing reality and transcendent imagination. Describing this enticing, desirable woman much as Eliot describes the hyacinth girl in *The Waste Land*, the narrator says:

And yet she seems real—more real than the Tamiami Trail four miles to east, with its Smorgorama and Giganticburger stands, more real than the back streets of Sarasota. I do not ask her who she is. I know what she will say. But then she smiles and starts to speak before I can turn away. “Porpozec ciebie . . .” she begins. Then either I awake in despair or am waked by the sound of rain on the palms. . . . I think of some plumber who, waked by the rain, will smile at a vision of the world in which all the drains are miraculously cleansed and free. Right-angle drains, crooked drains, root-choked and rusty drains all gargle and discharge their waters into the sea. . . . Then I sit up in bed and exclaim aloud to myself, “Valor! Love! Virtue! Compassion! Splendor! Kindness! Wisdom! Beauty!” The words seem to have the colors of the earth, and as I recite them I feel my hopefulness mount until I am contented and at peace with the night. (pp. 610–11)

As this passage eloquently demonstrates, Cheever's persona believes many of the connecting links of twentieth-century life are inadequate to men's and women's expressive needs. If these chains and links are still in place, for many, they have become bonds and shackles rather than pathways to communication or love. The garish Tamiami Trail and the vulgar backstreets of Sarasota are convoluted thoroughfares for those who travel them. The woman in the narrator's dream has more reality for this dreamer than these roadways have. Moreover, Cheever's persona questions the purpose of love or eroticism in the modern world if it functions only as a dream. Often the communication attained with the object of desire is the same nonsense syllables of social approval, religious affirmation, or athletic victory the narrator has heard in other dreams.

In despair, the protagonist turns to the practical world and thoughts of a plumber wakened by rain from a pleasant dream of a world without clogged drains. This vision could only occur in a world

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where connections are made, arches arch, chains link, and our most soothing dreams flow into reality. Its sheer sublimity enables the protagonist to decode his linguistic puzzle. "Porpozec ciebie nie prosze dorzanin albo zyolpocz ciwego" means valor, love, virtue, compassion, splendor, kindness, wisdom, beauty. The narrator searches desperately for these qualities in the modern world. Yet he finds them only in this ersatz, Slavic language of his dreams. The tale ends with the narrator repeating these invaluable but diminishing attributes. In an almost religious epiphany, he forms an ecstatic chain of being reaching from earth to the heavens above him. The narrator could bridge the gap between the language of his dreams and the virtues those words represent if only these qualities were more abundant in the modern world.

"A Vision of the World" serves as a paradigm of a kind of Cheever story in which a narrator attempts to use his imagination to connect his tranquilizing dreams with the wilderness of twentieth-century existence. In these tales Cheever shapes fictive experience into the arch of a dream. One can also see how this story suggests interesting applications to other stories throughout Cheever's career. The arch-chain-bridge metaphor has immediate affinity with a frequently anthologized Cheever story, "The Angel of the Bridge," from *The Brigadier and the Golf Widow* (1964). In this tale the bridge of the title is the Tappan Zee Bridge, a contemporary New York thoroughfare swirling with terrifying traffic and inhuman speed. The George Washington and the Triborough Bridges completely paralyze the protagonist's driving reflexes. However the Tappan Zee finally proves crossable when the narrator gives a ride to a female hitchhiker—a kind of angel—whose beautiful voice calms the narrator and enables him to travel the bridge.

What Cheever has done in this story is to forge a poetic bridge of correspondences that serves as a parallel to the frightening automotive bridges men and women have inherited from mid-twentieth century, machine-ridden technology. In "A Vision of the World" the protagonist attempts to translate the security of his dreams into the manic, incomprehensible dreamland of contemporary suburbia. Analogously in "The Angel of the Bridge," the preconscious fear of its protagonist becomes that all the bridges in New York will collapse as he drives over them. This hysteria describes the interior life of a man whose dreams have given way to nightmares. This traumatized protagonist must maintain an almost impossible equilibrium between the terror unleashed by the mechanizations of suburban America and the spiritual vertigo he feels as an individual driven by this society.

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The ultimate horror of this story is that not only the narrator but his mother and older brother have been afflicted by a similar *cafard*, a fear of the mechanization and change inherent in midcentury America. This phobia so intensifies that it transforms its victims into machines, automatons ruled and programmed by their dread. While the narrator is partially sympathetic to their fates, he also feels their conditions are ridiculous. His brother has become a man terrified of elevators because he believes all the skyscrapers in New York will fall on one another as he ascends from floor to floor. His mother's situation is equally grotesque. She is a woman so frightened of change that she spends her days skating on the rink at Rockefeller Center since it reminds her of her childhood in St. Botolphs, Massachusetts. The narrator's jealousy of his brother's social standing and his hostility to his mother's nostalgia for the past make family ties too emotionally ambiguous a chain for him to accept their *cafards*.

Only when he arrives at the highest point in the arc of a bridge does the narrator exhibit his own *cafard*. His frenzy shows how his own dreams have become nightmares about the ugliness and duplicity of American life. Such moments also reveal how deeply he hates the flimsy, hypocritical chains of appearance we erect to bridge the gaps between surfaces and reality. On a trip to southern California, the narrator observes the chaos of Sunset Boulevard at three a.m. In this epiphany, he discovers the connecting link between his vision of the world and his fear of bridges:

But the height of bridges seemed to be one link I could not forge or fasten in this hypocritical chain of acceptances. The truth is, I hate freeways and Buffalo Burgers. Expatriated palm trees and monotonous housing developments depress me. The continuous music on special-fare trains exacerbates my feelings. I detest the destruction of familiar landmarks. I am deeply troubled by the misery and drunkenness I find among my friends, I abhor the dishonest practices I see. And it was at the highest point in the arc of a bridge that I became aware suddenly of the depth and bitterness of my feelings about modern life, and of the profoundness of my yearnings for a more vivid, simple, and peaceable world. (pp. 584-85)

The aesthetic tension of "The Angel of the Bridge" evolves from the emotion of a writer who realizes that despite his fear of bridges, he desperately needs these constructs. Cheever's consistent artistic quest was the effort to forge a bridge of correspondences between the grim, macabre realities of post-World War II American life and the dreams, aspirations, imaginative possibilities, and even nightmares that many

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Americans use to evade these actualities. The writer's task thus becomes the same as the individual dreamer's: to use the imagination to record the world of dreams and anxieties and to counterbalance a frighteningly technological world with structures of hope, imagination, and love.

"The Angel of the Bridge" is a particularly rich Cheever story. It examines the actual bridges of a menacing, industrialized world, the imaginative bridges of dream and language, and the hereditary bridges of family bonds and ties which haunted all of Cheever's life and art. At the highest arc of the Tappan Zee Bridge, the narrator confronts his most intense fear. All he can see before him is the sweating face of his brother in a claustrophobic elevator and his mother going around and around on the ice at Rockefeller Center. His family symbolizes those links that give him personal history but which also lock him into molds determined by blood and genes. He pulls to the side of the Tappan Zee and prays that his totally debilitating anguish will pass. Meanwhile he insists that all the bridges in the world are falling down. Yet as he relates the incident, this bridge of family weakness still stands, fixed in place before his harried consciousness:

I remembered my brother's face, sallow and greasy with sweat in the elevator, and my mother in her red skirt, one leg held gracefully aloft as she coasted backward in the arms of a rink attendant and it seemed to me that we were all three characters in some bitter and sordid tragedy, carrying impossible burdens and separated from the rest of mankind by our misfortunes. My life was over and it would never come back, everything that I loved—blue-sky courage, lustiness, the natural grasp of things. It would never come back. I would end up in the psychiatric ward of the county hospital, screaming that the bridges, all the bridges in the world, were falling down. (p. 586)

Once again, the essential dilemmas for the Cheever protagonist remain. Should he believe that the frail bridge of language he uses to recount his trauma might be an adequate means of opposing the horrors of reality? Is he justified in feeling that these bridges are inadequate, or that they have all collapsed? Finally, should he fear any bridge that attempts to link exterior, manufactured appearances with vulnerable human yearnings? Moreover, if these bridges are functional, how does the Cheever narrator translate the aspirations of his dreams? These are the qualities that Cheever calls in the preceding passage, "blue-sky courage, lustiness, the natural grasp of things." Unfortunately, they are found nowhere in the story. To triumph, these virtues

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must become forces that can effectively overwhelm the soulless mayhem of the highways or the agonizing *cafards* of his family and himself.

Cheever resolves the seemingly insoluble problem in "The Angel of the Bridge" with almost divine intervention. A young woman folksinger hitchhiking on the Tappan Zee interprets the narrator's stopped car as a sign that her signaling has been answered. She enters his car carrying a small harp in a cracked oilskin. Then she proceeds to sing to him the English folk ballad "I gave my love a cherry that had no stone." Listening to her music, the narrator miraculously finds the courage to cross the bridge. He records his almost ecstatic transformation as a nearly religious conversion:

She sang me across a bridge that seemed to be an astonishingly sensible, durable, and even beautiful construction designed by intelligent men to simplify my travels, and the water of the Hudson below us was charming and tranquil. It all came back—blue-sky courage, the high spirits of lustiness, an ecstatic serenity. (p. 587)

Similarly, in "A Vision of the World," the repetition of a phrase in an invented language becomes a mystical, religious epiphany. This transformation parallels the appearance of the beautiful, pure-voiced angel in "The Angel of the Bridge," whose song creates this story's musical dream vision. In both cases, the language of these events supplies the link, the bridge between the world of dream and the terrifying emptiness of modern life. Moreover, Cheever translates his protagonists' dreams. Their visions represent those sublime qualities of love, courage, and compassion found in our dreams but dwindling in an absurdly industrialized world.

Examining closely only these two stories nonetheless evokes the suggestiveness and depth of Cheever's vision of the world. In these tales and throughout his stories and novels, Cheever is a Jungian, neo-Transcendentalist writer who skillfully orchestrates chains of association that link unlikely realms of appearance and reality, cause and effect, behavior and emotion. Cheever seems more Jungian than Freudian not because he ridiculed psychoanalysis as his daughter states in her memoir,⁶ or because he evades the force of family strife on the ego as we see in "The Angel of the Bridge" and other stories. Rather, in all his writing Cheever consistently avoids painstaking, psychological examination of his personae's identities and their family turmoils. Quite characteristically, Cheever told John Hershey in a 1977 interview: "I have no memory for pain."⁷ But as Susan Cheever's memoir so vividly chronicles, Cheever had vast reservoirs and storehouses of pain. Hence

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Cheever's writing floats on the shimmering surface of lives and consciously skirts the troubled, Freudian depths.

Fortuitously, Cheever's writing most frequently appeared in the *New Yorker* and emerged from the publishing world of the Thirties. This journalistic preserve was a male enclave in which direct hints of homoeroticism in a developing American writer might have created difficulties for this writer and the fashionable, reserved magazine in which his work was first acclaimed. For fifty years Cheever was so wedded to the *New Yorker* that much of his writing about sex and sexuality appears there as myth and code. Nonetheless, any serious reader of Cheever can find stories other than "A Vision of the World" and "The Angel of the Bridge" in which emasculating, harridan wives or mothers are transformed by stories' end into angels or chaste goddesses. These creations free the protagonists to translate their vision of beauty to the world. As feminists and psychologists are surely observing and as Susan Cheever's book confirms, Cheever was doubtlessly a writer who alternately feared, admired, and hated the women in his art. In them he found greater sources of control and creativity than in his male narrators and protagonists.

Ultimately, much of Cheever's writing as demonstrated in these two tales seems a continual search for the language and structure to contain his sacramental dream vision. As Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., defines Cheever's goal: "Cheever's writing since the mid-fifties . . . seems at its deepest levels of meaning and value to be his groping both for a conceptual framework to explain his apprehensions and also for a language and form to express them."⁸ Therefore, dream becomes the medium, while song or heightened language serves as the expression of this quest. Congruently, the arch, bridge, or link functions as the overriding shape of his dream vision. Consistently, ecstatic religious sensation seems his stories' goal. Likewise, feminine intuition emerges as the spark or goad that enables Cheever's narrators to span their linguistic distances. Throughout his career Cheever attempted to suffuse his surreal suburbs with qualities of love, courage, faith, and compassion. He found these attributes vanishing in midcentury America, and he desperately sought the words and vision to translate these virtues across his bridge of language.

¹ Susan Cheever, *Home before Dark* (Boston: Houghton, 1984), p. 199.

² Frederick Bracher, "John Cheever's Vision of the World," and Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., "John Cheever and the Grave of Social Coherence," in *Critical*

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Essays on John Cheever, ed. R. G. Collins (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), pp. 168–79 and pp. 109–22.

³ Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, "Interview with John Cheever," in *Critical Essays on John Cheever*, p. 12.

⁴ R. G. Collins, ed. and intro., *Critical Essays on John Cheever*, p. 12.

⁵ John Cheever, *The Collected Stories* (New York: Ballantine, 1980), pp. 606–07. All subsequent references are from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

⁶ Susan Cheever, *Home before Dark*, pp. 163–65.

⁷ John Hershey, "Interview with John Cheever," in *Critical Essays on John Cheever*, p. 106.

⁸ Burhans, "John Cheever and the Grave of Social Coherence," p. 110.

Two Affairs Revisited

JOSEPH HYNES

In these pages I want to gather my reflections on two books considered in tandem—Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) and Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* (1951); for these books have much in common despite their obvious topical and technical differences. I make this effort because in my opinion a strong argument can be urged—and I will eventually urge it—that these novels are their authors' best or near-best rather than the unfortunate failures which some readers have felt them to be. My hope is that treatment of the books together will assist me in bringing out analogous virtues. I want to mention first some problems confronting any author attempting what Greene and Waugh tried in these books. Then I will move to what seem to be principal characteristics of each author's craft in attempting to meet and resolve these problems. Each work must of course rise or sink on its own merits, but each work's merits may well be better seen in the context of the other's.

The first problem for Waugh and Greene in the case of the books in question is obvious but sometimes critically slighted or ignored: each writer wished to manifest as clearly as possible what Waugh calls "the operation of divine grace" in the lives of a handful of characters. That is, each writer wanted to present a novel in the realistic tradition which would make plain or strongly urge the reality of God's becoming the crucial fact of life for some characters who appear indifferent to such a possibility, or who scoff at or resist any such notion. After the intense secularization that is the history of at least the past 400 years, and especially after the arrival of Darwin, Marx, and Freud—not to mention more recent scientific advances, calamitous wars, and the post-Sartrean demolition, the difficulty of getting readers to comprehend and take seriously a belief in the supernatural is profound. The increased

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difficulty of getting readers to take the point that such a belief leads to a revision (not a cancellation) of one's entire secular reality would seem to many authors insurmountable. Imagining of belief, or suspension of nonbelief, has, in my experience of teaching these books, proved to be something which many are unable or unwilling to try, and may positively resist. Readers are often much more able to read the work of black or Jewish writers—to take just two examples of other minority writing; but this is probably traceable to the fact that white and Gentile readers are for the most part (not always) being asked only to imagine the condition of other human beings in concrete social situations. That is, the demand is for the reader to envision differences still solidly within the conventional realistic novel tradition. This black or Jewish territory is undoubtedly new for most readers, but it does not require our positing the supreme reality—a God who created, knows, and acts upon the world of the realistic novel and all of its inhabitants (including those who would act as authors within the bounds of what they see to be authored), regardless of era, race, sex, age, social status, or indeed condition of servitude. The reader today has been largely conditioned away from the possibility of any such imaginative endeavor. For example, *The Color Purple* feels more familiar when God drops out and Celie begins writing to her sister instead.

How might a novelist proceed, in the light of such historical anti-conditioning, to induce readers to entertain at least the possibility of this larger reality? In the cases at hand both writers either deliberately or instinctively avoided overt authorial preachment. Each writer chose to frame his fiction as a first-person narrative. The first person at once implies (to some extent no doubt falsely) the author's removal from identification with the experiences of his narrator. The first person also demands that the author make us forget what the narrator tells us has already occurred in the narrator's life. Although the narrator will already have made decisions as a result of digesting what he gradually and selectively presents to us, the narrator leads us step-by-step to the place from which he now narrates. Only by being led in this way can we appreciate how the narrator reached time-present and share his experiences of past and present alike.

Of course we are being tricked as any work tricks us; but the first-person narrative presents problems that do not arise for the uninvolved third-person storyteller. Only when the narrator has trained us to see, presume, conclude, take for granted as he had done, will he be ready to snap his trap on us as the trap had been snapped on him. Thus his plot is to deceive us with respect to the plot against himself.

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Then when he springs the trap we see of course much of what he had been withholding from us until that point. But it is then too late—if we are playing fair with his narrative—to run away from the trap. We have to deal as he did with the consequences of his and our own entrapment. Such is always true in fiction, obviously. But readers tend to resist strongly the suggestion that they now have to regard religious implications and possibilities just as seriously as they regard social and cultural situations and ramifications. Introduce a religious *donnée* and the reader is likely to assert or to imply that writers are not entitled to nonrealistic subject matter. Some *données* are apparently more equal than others.¹

In these novels by Waugh and Greene,² the narrators have much in common. Waugh's Charles Ryder has been a virtual orphan all of his life. He was unhappily married and has been separated or divorced for about a decade at the time of narrating. His two children might as well not exist for all the difference they make to his life or attitude. He is an architectural painter who apparently regards himself as a failed artist. He had hoped that the army in World War II might give him reason to live meaningfully, but that hope is also dashed before the start of the narrative.³ His art shows up in his manner of arranging his narrative. He employs what has been called the "sandwich" form—penultimate present, past leading to and in some ways accounting for the attitude revealed in the penultimate present, and then the ultimate present showing that the narrator has fooled us into supposing that we knew him accurately after we had read the penultimate present section—or even after we had read the past section. All of these parts (chronologically 2-1-3) are of course prior to the actual telling of the sectioned story, with the result that when we have read the entire narrative we instinctively reconstruct the parts in straight chronological order (1-2-3) to get a better grip on what this novel (i.e., who this narrator-character) is. When we find out, we have understood this first-person novel.⁴

Greene proceeds a few years later in many of the same ways. Maurice Bendrix is also seemingly parentless. He has never been married and tells us that he has never loved—though that he has been "in love" he admits. Like Ryder at the time of narrating, Bendrix is apparently a loveless loner. He is a professional novelist of some modest reputation, with what he and his critics regard as a knack for technique. That technique shows up here in the extraordinary chronological pattern that Greene arranges for Bendrix to describe as he tells his story. Bendrix lays out five Books. These Books, however, move back

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and forth constantly from year to year. The narrative is offered to us in 1949; Sarah and Henry Miles had been married in 1929; Bendrix and Sarah met and fell into adulterous love in 1939; their affair ended in 1944; they did not meet again until 1946, the year of Sarah's death and thus three years before the time of Bendrix's narrative. Like Ryder, Bendrix shows himself to be a seeker, a detective in fact, as well as a lover (despite his denials) and an autobiographical novelist. Also like Ryder, he is rather mean, nasty, selfish in his unhappiness. Bendrix, however, is able to insert into his narrative large pieces of Sarah's diary from 1944 to 1946—both a first-person narrative in its own right and an epistolary narrative like those of Richardson and Laclos. Like other epistolary fiction, Sarah's journal has about it a quality that might be thought of as characterizing a "second-person" narrative, because it is not addressed to Bendrix, who reads it against her will, or to us, who read it over his shoulder. Sarah writes to "You" (in this case God) as Clarissa and Cécile correspond with those addressed in their letters rather than with us. The journal is planted in the middle of what we had taken to be a casual or even distractedly inattentive chronological delivery of Bendrix's own narrative. This random-seeming narrative ordering obviously shows Greene's own technical skill—his high art—and it leads, as does the ordering by Charles Ryder, to reflections for which the reader had almost certainly been no more ready than had the two narrators in question.

Ryder's narrative shows us urbanely and economically and in large part implicitly that neither he nor we had known where he was headed in his quest for love, and it leaves us to infer or imagine where he will go now that he has reached the point clarified at the "end" of his narrative. Bendrix's narrative is noisier because he is a more violent type. His story, like Ryder's, demonstrates the accuracy of the adage that "God writes straight with crooked lines." At the close of this narrative Bendrix is still characteristically saying to himself, and to the God in whom he refuses to admit that he believes, that he has not come out of the narrated events where we have seen him come out—indeed, where both he and we have seen him come out by virtue of Bendrix's own manifest integrity in laying out his experiences nonchronologically to such powerful effect. The whole of Bendrix's novel-search-autobiography shows the gradually evolving force of his opening statement: "A story has no beginning or end; arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead" (*EA*, p. 3). One does no such thing, of course, if one is Bendrix or Ryder facing the need to chart matters in realistic fashion. One proceeds very

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craftily to make the reader suppose that beginnings and ends of stories are irrelevant.

Beginnings and ends are never irrelevant to writers, nor are they irrelevant to anyone else. We live by clocks and calendars. Yet Ryder's 2-1-3 ordering and Bendrix's illusion of grapeshot firing do make sense of Bendrix's stated indifference to chronology. For both narratives are clearly concerned to convince readers of the reality of that which is outside of time: eternity, the timeless, the ever-now. People do not commonly live, think, or write in this way or of such notions—and that is why readers tend to miss out on these books and on the considerable art that produced them. To get these books head-on and full-force requires us to give ourselves imaginatively to the proposition that informs both of them: that we operate on one chronologically arranged scheme while God operates on an unchangeable and untimed one. This proposition evokes the swamp of God's foreknowledge and our freedom, of course. While I do not think it fruitful to get mired in that one, I still want to emphasize that our appreciation of these two novels requires our supposing, imagining, the coexistence of eternity and time, of changelessness and change, of what is willed for us and what we choose from moment to moment. We have to entertain the idea that God's straight writing cannot be altered, even as we also note that the "crooked lines" describe our own choosing to go where the straight lines dictate that we must eventually go.

Putting this paradox differently, we might say that our realistic heads tell us that our way is not God's way. What these books try to make us consider is that our realistic and usual view is inevitably limited, myopic, half-true, wrong: in the end as in the beginning, it is simply impossible for anything to occur outside of God's will. It is typical of orthodox Catholicism to insist on *both* divine plan and individual human choice, whether or not their compatibility can be explained. Anyone may (must?) lean in one direction or the other, as Greene typically leans toward Jansenistic flirtation with determinism; but belief in absolute determinism or in absolute freedom of choice is tantamount to a break with Catholicism.

This proposition means that the life laid out by Ryder and by Bendrix seemed to each of them to be in his own hands and in those of his acquaintances—and so we suppose as we read the narrative crookedness trickily arranged by Ryder and Bendrix. What we discover, if we give ourselves to the course of events as the two involved narrators have had to give themselves, is that two levels of will have been operating all the while; that each protagonist had been aware of only

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one such level of will; and that sudden consciousness of the other level has effected a drastic change of attitude and has also produced these two narratives. A closer look at each of the novels alone will clarify this thesis and enable us to bring the two fictions together once again more significantly.

First, Charles Ryder's 2-1-3 arrangement. Ryder awakens one dank morning in 1944, in England, as in a medieval dream vision, to find that he has been before where the army's movements have brought him at this time. To his medieval-romance query, "What's this place called?" (BR, p. 21), he is given the answer which sets off his memory and occasions the recollection of the weighty middle section of the novel, his past. The place is of course Brideshead Castle, and Ryder is inevitably and painfully put in vivid mind of the family who variously occupied it whether they wished to do so or not. Ryder and Sebastian Flyte (the significant family name) were friends of the same year at Oxford, in 1923. Julia Flyte is perhaps a year younger than Sebastian. Brideshead, the eldest son, seems fifty but is only a few years Sebastian's senior. The fourth child is Cordelia, about twelve in 1923. In a number of ways Cordelia and her father evoke the father-daughter relationships in *King Lear*. Lady Marchmain, the mother, is a pious Catholic whose husband chose to leave her and to remain in Italy after World War I.

The story of these characters develops as a battle of wills. Lord Marchmain has striven to take a new course apart from his wife, his family, personal involvement with his duties as a peer, and especially his Catholicism, to which his marriage had returned him and which he conjoins with his wife as objects of hatred—according to his credible mistress, Cara. Sebastian, like his father, struggles to escape what he regards as the life-killing clutches of his Catholic belief and of the family who embody that faith: his struggle is unavailing. Julia resembles Sebastian in this way as well as in appearance—facts important to Ryder's development. Brideshead ("Bridey") is an unquestioning believer, maddeningly unimaginative in Ryder's view and thus refreshingly direct at times. Lady Marchmain is a firm Catholic who prays for her troubled children and suffers grave pangs of personal responsibility at their straying. Cordelia is unshakable in her belief but delightfully disarming in her acceptance of people on their own terms. The family, then, are equally divided: three are firm believers but quite different from one another, while three others are tormented souls who would be disbelievers if they could be, but who experience their own kinds of acute pain because they cannot be disbelievers.

Ryder's recollections are made up of the efforts of these six and of

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himself to exert their wills. In this turmoil Ryder is often and understandably lost. He cannot at all understand what the Catholic religion has to do with what people want or ought to want, do, have. He regularly asks Bridey and Sebastian and Julia if they really believe all the things Catholicism posits, and why it is that Catholicism appears to make so many of its adherents unhappy. Sebastian is patient with Ryder's a-religious career (which he would like to share) and simply says that he wishes it were true that what Catholics believe is untrue. Julia says virtually the same thing. They tell Ryder nicely but clearly that what he means by happiness is not the point of their religion: if it is true, then one cannot turn away from it, no matter how miserable it may make one by conflicting with what one would so much rather do. Bridey blandly wonders whether Sebastian would have been happy as a nonbeliever, but he plainly regards the point as one of idle speculation inasmuch as Sebastian does believe: that's that for Bridey. Lord Marchmain comes home and dies a Christian death, as it were against his will. Lady Marchmain dies thinking herself a failed wife and mother because some of her children and her husband have left the Church despite or because of her strong will. Yet after her death she turns out to have been mistaken in her reading of what was going on, for Marchmain comes back, Sebastian is unable to break away (though he cannot abide his family home), and Julia—most importantly for Ryder's life and memoirs—follows Sebastian in being unable to say no to God.

Through the entire middle section of *Brideshead Revisited*—i.e., through the past section—Ryder seems to be squarely on the side of personal independence and of the three would-be renegades' efforts to break from a religion which appears unintelligible to him and in which he has not the slightest bit of belief and only such interest as will make him a polite houseguest on the frequent occasions of his visitations to the separated members of this family. And at the end of this middle section, Ryder fights as hard as he can to keep the dying Marchmain from seeing the parish priest. He does not know why he fights so ardently, and especially against the inclinations of Julia to allow the priest access to her father, but to the reader it gradually becomes clear that Ryder is fighting to preserve his secular dream of the earthly paradise—life with Julia in some place of worldly splendor such as Brideshead Castle represents to him at that time. He is afraid—with reason—that his repeated experience of the Flytes as a group in which happiness and religious belief are mismatched is about to be reenacted in the lives of himself and Julia, who had appeared to share his antireligious sentiments but who is now operating on some wavelength

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with which he remains unfamiliar no matter how much he had seen it working in the life of Sebastian, whom Charles calls "the forerunner."

When, after losing the battle to keep the priest away, Ryder kneels as he has seen Julia and Cara—two seemingly unlikely kneelers—do, he prays to the God in whom he professes to have no belief. He prays that Marchmain will not reject the priest's offer of absolution. He is motivated to make the prayer because he loves Julia and knows what she wants and wants what she wants. His prayer is spontaneous and contrary to the worldly self-interest in accord with which he has been making his choices. When Marchmain then makes the sign of the cross Ryder knows very well that his prayer has been answered, disastrously for his secular dreams of Julia and Brideshead Castle. Like Sebastian and Marchmain, Julia proves to have been hooked (to use Waugh's reference to Chesterton's "twitch upon the thread," where God acts as fisherman), and Ryder cannot deny the force of the sign that has succeeded upon his prayer. When he then says to Julia that he does understand why they two must separate, the reader should know that Ryder's love for Julia has led him to lose her. Ryder had been "written straight" toward one outcome, although he had been seeing—and he has been narrating—his "crooked" choices as if they were heading him toward his idea of happiness rather than toward God's and Sebastian's and Julia's and Lady Marchmain's idea of the true. The past (middle) section ends with Ryder's sense that a symbolic avalanche has fallen, cold and crushing and too heavy to be withstood. The "hound of heaven" motif is established; the hunter has been hunted down—as will prove true again in the Greene novel.

In the brief third section, the ultimate present, Ryder shows himself to have embraced Catholicism in the four or five years since that deathbed avalanche. He also—as narrator after the events of the ultimate present—shows us how cleverly he had rigged the narrative to make us suppose that the narrator's present perspective has remained that of the younger Ryder in his scoffing and skepticism. The narrator's experience and the reader's, then, are analogous. He had headed one way and been taken another; he sees to it that we, too, take one road before he alters our course to make us see and feel what he had experienced.

There would not necessarily seem to be much love for God in all of this, but that there is truth Ryder cannot deny; and he adheres to what he cannot deny. He is just where Bridey in his infuriating assurance had told him that Sebastian and Julia were in their Catholic convictions—and the loss of secular happiness is both horrendous and beside the

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point. Sebastian and Marchmain and Julia had struggled, like Ryder, to impose their wills on experience. Marchmain had even altered his legal will to deny his orthodox elder son the earthly Castle and to enable the supposed renegade Julia to inherit it. But these acts of will come to nothing that their imposers had foreseen. Instead, all these self-determining characters are determined by a will other than their own, and they see this.

The reader who gives Waugh his *donnée* also sees this. When Ryder writes on the last page of the ultimate present section that the characters had played in a "fierce little human tragedy," he means to acknowledge the secular loss, the suffering, of those who had tried to escape and of Lady Marchmain, who had died saddened by her sense of failure to do God's will. But when Ryder then changes his direction and his thinking and writes that all had been going where it was meant to go—as symbolized in the secularly unpredictable reopening of the Brideshead chapel—he tilts his book (and our experience of himself) in keeping with how he has seen life tilt the three persons with whom he had identified in his quest for happiness. And we know at last where he has begun to come out. His autobiographical quest-novel reaches the point of a new beginning instead of settling into either success or failure with respect to what he had formerly taken to be the object of his search. Not so incidentally, this outcome and that of Greene's novel both comment implicitly and ironically on the widespread notion that life for believers is easy because they no longer have anything to worry them: they have been "saved." On the contrary, characters in these books are aware of salvation as a lifelong struggle and they work in vain to be liberated from the burden of belief. No mindless joy here.

Maurice Bendrix's life, quest, and novel are quite similar to Ryder's in many ways, whether or not Greene was influenced by Waugh's example of a conversion story. Bendrix follows Ryder's course in thinking that the only reality is that depicted or sought by the writer of realistic fiction, and in seducing the reader of this life-book into taking for granted this basic secular premise. Unlike Ryder, however, Bendrix is even more committed to making real the distinction between the realist's premises on which he has always acted, and the premises of one who now accepts a reality which includes that of the realist but which is itself boundless. Hence the shape of Bendrix's book.

Where Waugh employs the rather traditional and effective 2-1-3 ordering of Conrad and others, Greene has his first-person narrator use the method of "backstitching" chronologically within each of the novel's five Books, so that we are constantly shifting from year to year,

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decade to decade, from 1929 to 1949. In this way Bendrix fills us in gradually with respect to what he wants us to know and what he now remembers to have seemed important to him at a given time, and/or what he now regards as important. Sometimes the distinction between what he placed emphasis upon then, and what he stresses only now, is impossible to make—for us and perhaps for the narrator as well. Even more importantly, Bendrix arranges his five-part narrative so that the third part—the core of the book and of his experience—is the diary of Sarah Miles: a first-person account which he cannot deny no matter how urgently he has longed to cancel the validity of this narrative *donnée* never meant for his eyes.

Bendrix is obviously, in retrospect, a wonderful trickster. The reader finally comes to realize that all along Bendrix has necessarily been converted (like Ryder) from his Zogartian realism to a sort of bitter if inevitable acceptance of the supernatural reality which is as far as possible from the ken of the usual realist. The reader also sees, however, that, grudging and mixed as Bendrix's new awareness may be, he has behaved with absolute integrity so far as his duty to his narrative account—his life—is concerned. Bendrix's chore has been that of making convincing, to us and possibly to himself, the course by which he has been changed. We see that the constant time-shifts are in aid of Bendrix's implying the manner in which the time-and-place concreteness of the realist has come to be quite compatible with his current conviction that reality is vaster than the realist's vision—as Hamlet's vision is bigger than Horatio's. Indeed, Bendrix tells us almost as much in recounting how he felt when he had read Sarah's diary and then had read her letter delivered to him after her death:

If I were writing a novel I would end it here; a novel, I used to think, has to end somewhere, but I'm beginning to believe my realism has been at fault all these years for nothing now in life ever seems to end. . . . So what an optimist I would be if I thought that this story ended here. (EA, p. 183)

He wishes to adhere to his realism, but honesty requires that he tell the truth of his experience. And his writer's habit requires that he try to make that experience as vivid for us as for himself. Thus the carefully crafted and seemingly careless flitting from time to time. For the truth as he now sees it is that, just as Sebastian and Julia had been forerunners for God in Ryder's life, so Sarah and his intense physical love for her had been—are—forerunners for the awareness of God. Affairs happen in time and space, the realist's realm, which ends. Love may be triggered by any number of occurrences in time and place, but

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is not finally dependent upon those temporal and spatial conditions. Indeed, love does not and cannot end. Sarah's diary, which is written to herself and as letters to God, convinces Bendrix that she loves both himself and God:

what I found when I opened the journal was not what I was expecting. . . . I had expected plenty of evidence against her evidence that she had left him for another lover, another man . . . and now, here in writing that I could believe as I couldn't believe her voice, was the complete answer. . . . It's a strange thing to discover and to believe that you are loved, when you know that nothing is there for anybody but a parent or a God to love. (EA, p. 107).

The narrative indirectly shows what is meant by the biblical reminder that "God is love" (John 4:8). Neither noun can end, and the two nouns are interchangeable around the verb "to be." Such is Bendrix's experience.

We have to remember that that experience is coming to us in 1949, by which time Bendrix's experiences have qualified him not merely as Sarah's lover, but as her double: the writer of this novel has spent the three years since Sarah's death in going through the same terrible struggle that her diary shows her to have known. Some examples will make this point clearer.

For one thing, Sarah finds that she no longer has an appetite for sex with others after she has relinquished her affair with Bendrix. Bendrix discovers that he is literally impotent with any woman other than Sarah. Again, Sarah first thinks, in meditating on the Crucifix, that the wounds are ugly, that nobody could believe in a God incarnate and humanly vulnerable, and that God and true love would be possible only if God were pure spirit and we were removed somehow from our bodies' desires. Then she abruptly shifts her thinking—because of her physical love for Bendrix—and utters her gratitude for the flesh—Bendrix's, her own, and Christ's. Bendrix goes through the same psychological transition in thinking, first, that he wants to see the end of Sarah's body at the crematorium so that he will have seen the end of Sarah, and then thinking, at the crematorium, that Sarah somehow exists to be prayed to and to answer prayers. (Henry Miles makes the same kind of point when he says that he used to miss Sarah when she was out at the movies, but that now that she has no body and cannot be somewhere else, she is never anywhere but with him in the house.)

A final observation on Sarah and Bendrix as twins is prompted by Sarah's "abandonment" at the moment of sexual climax and by her

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sense of boundless "desert" on the morning after she has given up Bendrix. These two references are to vast emptiness. Yet in her later diary reflections Sarah takes herself to task for supposing so foolishly that love is limited by the body or to the body. In writing to God, she says:

"Did I ever love Maurice as much before I loved You? Or was it really You I loved all the time? Did I touch You when I touched him? Could I have touched You if I hadn't touched him first, touched him as I never touched Henry, anybody? And he loved me and touched me as he never did with any other woman. But was it me he loved, or You? For he hated in me all the things You hate. He was on Your side all the time without knowing it. . . . He gave me so much love and I gave him so much love that soon there wasn't anything left when we'd finished but You. For either of us." (EA, pp. 150-51)

In other words, the sense of emptiness has given way to a sense of fullness, of all-inclusiveness. It cannot be said of Bendrix that his desert has flowered in this way, but it can be said that he remains conscious of Sarah, thinks of her and talks to her, and that the work he writes for us to read is testimony to his bitter conviction that love still holds him and Sarah together. Thus when he ends his writing with a prayer, we have to read him in more ways than one. Bendrix writes: "O God, You've done enough, You've robbed me of enough. I'm too tired and old to learn to love. Leave me alone forever" (EA, p. 240). We note that this prayer adds up to a futility of which Bendrix's own novel makes us conscious. Specifically, here he uses the upper-case "You" that Sarah had used, although he wants to tell himself that God is not. Moreover, as Sarah writes in her diary, Bendrix talks hate but clearly loves. His reluctance to give in to love is his fear of the consequences of such a surrender. Finally, the whole book witnesses to his awareness that he is not and cannot be alone—just as the whole book demonstrates that he has come to feel the reality of a term like "forever," a term that of course a genuine materialist could not use. For Bendrix as for Sarah, his double, the emptiness has turned out to be fullness.

In a great many ways, then, timing and narrative structure make important sense. In *Brideshead Revisited* Ryder uses the familiar device of withholding the actual psychology of the narrator in time present, until he has misled us and got our modern realist's confidence aroused that if it isn't material it isn't real—or it just isn't. In *The End of the Affair* the narrator spreads heavily his malice, jealousy, hatred, self-loathing, and no-nonsense sexual desire, with the result that he has us feeling exactly

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as he felt just when he was stricken with Sarah's narrative. "I've caught belief like a disease," writes Sarah (*EA*, p. 182). Bendrix has constructed his narrative to show that he cannot resist the same "disease." Carnality had initiated two loves, not only one, despite his fierce desire to believe that only matter makes sense. Whether we are immune or not is hardly the point; what matters is that we see the force of the experience for the ones who have gone through it.

The women characters are the ones who go through this experience initially in each book. Julia knows that her affair with Ryder cannot continue on its present footing, and she finally knows that they cannot simply marry and make honest lovers of each other. Ryder comes to share this view, in what seems like an instant but what has really been a process of about fifteen years—from the time of his meeting Sebastian until the moment of Lord Marchmain's calamitous lifesaving gesture. Similarly, Sarah begins to believe the moment her prayer has been answered, when Bendrix rises from what she had thought to be sure death. When God gives him a second chance at life, Sarah keeps her bargain with God (a familiar Greene device) and gives up Bendrix. She says to Bendrix on that occasion that "You needn't be so scared. Love doesn't end. Just because we don't see each other." The Bendrix of 1944 of course thinks this view to be perfect nonsense, given his and Sarah's knowledge of the intense physicality of their relationship. Thus when she adds that "Everything must be all right. If we love enough," he retorts that "I can't turn on any more. . . . You've got everything." But she concludes the exchange with the assurance that overpowers him years later: "You don't know. . . . You don't know" (*EA*, p. 82). At that point she does not "know," either; but her diary indicates that she has come to know of the all-pervasiveness of love, and Bendrix's book shows that he knows too. In both books, then, it should be clear that sexual reunion is ruled out not because either Waugh or Greene thinks the body dirty or evil (they do not think this), but because sexuality in each case is shown to serve a different end, a greater good. For Julia, sex can be morally expressed only in a marriage sanctioned by the Church—only in the sacrament of matrimony into which she and Charles cannot enter so long as she is married indissolubly to Rex Mottram. Charles makes no doctrinal statements, but his love for Julia means that he wills what she wills. In the Greene novel, Sarah simply experiences this sort of impossibility when she tries to leave Henry. Her dying avoids any need for the book to become involved with the formal doctrine of marriage or divorce.

Perhaps enough has been said about the unity of theme, character,

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narrative structure in each of these books. To make good the claim that these are among their authors' finest achievements, however, some specific objections must be addressed—not necessarily to overcome them or play them down, but to reflect upon their relative significance in the context of those matters which we have discussed as crucial to the thematic point and aesthetic value of these novels.

In the preface to his 1960 revision of *Brideshead Revisited* Waugh himself specified some things about the book that he regretted. For one thing, he somewhat regretted the ornate, lavish style by means of which he was trying to solidify certain aristocratic prewar qualities which he wrongly thought to be vanishing forever with World War II and the generation which for him typified its participants. And indeed the style is "purple" in the depiction of Oxford and Venice in the 1920s especially. At the same time, however, this quality in its suggestion of sentimentality works ironically to mislead the reader so that he or she is even more unready for the hard-nosed orthodox Christian psychology that takes over at the end from this cultural nostalgia. Waugh may well have regretted his style, then, but that style served him well, just as "crooked lines" ultimately make for a "straight" script.

A more important objection, one which he mentions in the revision and which many critics have made, is to a pair of scenes: Julia's "outburst" at the fountain after Bridey has spelled out, with brutal if innocent matter-of-factness, her adulterous way of life, and Lord Marchmain's dying monologue on the subject of aristocratic and Catholic traditions.⁵ Waugh says in his preface (pp. 7–8) that "these passages were never, of course, intended to report words actually spoken. They belong to a different way of writing from, say, the early scenes between Charles and his father. I would not now introduce them into a novel which elsewhere aims at verisimilitude."

I am not sure of what Waugh meant by "words actually spoken." It is clear that these words are not merely thought, like soliloquies merely accepted as unspoken. It is also unlikely that Waugh intended to distinguish the language of people from that of characters in a work of fiction: Julia and Marchmain both speak aloud and they do so as characters rather than as extra-novelistic persons. All I can suppose is that Waugh found the two speeches exaggeratedly rhetorical and out of keeping with the manner of realism. The two passages are indeed "speechy." At the same time, the televised version of *Brideshead Revisited* has shown effectively that the passages can be seen as more nearly realistic than their printed context had perhaps enabled us to observe. Diana Quick's Julia made it plain that the character was releasing a

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great store of repressed guilt, pain, and belief. The prose is indeed more pronouncedly rhetorical than anything else Julia says—but Julia spends nearly the whole of the book trying to de-emphasize precisely that fundamental orthodoxy to which her anguish gives vent on this one occasion. So I do not personally object to this speech, thanks in large part to Diana Quick's portrayal of Julia's situation.

The other passage also seems quite right to me, and always has seemed so. Lord Marchmain is obviously delirious in the last stages of this life, so that his rambling on and on about sacred and secular history makes good sense realistically—whatever one may think of the substance of those ramblings. The television production helped to make the point about his dwelling on the subject, by cutting away to different combinations of auditors at his bedside as he delivered himself of these sentiments, so that we might infer that he was out of control over an extended period of time. In any case, delirious people or characters may say anything and not be challenged for violating verisimilitude. So I think that neither of Waugh's objections (echoing others' objections) is very substantial.

What seems to me much more substantial is something not mentioned by Waugh, but commonly mentioned by perhaps a majority of readers. That is the difficulty of separating Ryder's (and Waugh's) orthodox Catholic commitment from Ryder's (and Waugh's) pronounced snobbery.⁶ Rex Mottram, for example, is considered an incomplete human being not only because he cannot see why marriage ought to preclude continued association with his mistress, and not only because his preoccupation with political power and social status blinds him to individuals, but also and importantly because he is a Canadian, because he cannot appreciate a first-rate French meal, and because he cannot distinguish between a port wine that satisfies the vulgar and one that only a connoisseur can cherish. Similarly, Lieutenant Hooper is shown by Ryder to be impossible and depressing and to bode ill for England and the human race not because he makes mistakes and can be duped by the troops, but because he has no proper sense of the value of such a place as Brideshead Castle, says "Rightyoh," and has a commoner's education and a Midlands accent. As we have noted, Waugh never mentions these items and qualities, although in *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957) he shows himself to be acutely aware of such objections and finds fault only with those who find fault: Pinfold returns unchanged from his voyage of introspection.

In my opinion, based on a reading of all of Waugh's fiction, Waugh and Pinfold shared this blind spot. Waugh could not see the validity of

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the objections or their bearing upon the effectiveness of his books. Charles Ryder is far from perfect, of course, and truly does not see that his lack of charity toward most of the world calls into at least modest question whether his conversion is primarily to the truth of Catholicism or to the power and persuasiveness of what he regards as the British aristocratic tradition (Catholic branch). One grants Waugh his *donnée* and Ryder the conditions of his life, of course: we have no business either demanding that Waugh write about working-class blokes or thinking that privileged persons cannot be taken seriously. At the same time, it is unsettling to have this doubt nagging at us.

I did not know, as a reader of Waugh's fiction—at least until the *Sword of Honor* trilogy concluded in 1961—how Waugh saw the scales balanced as between his social and his religious values; and I strongly suspect that he did not know either. For this reason I find it impossible to evaluate Ryder's eventual conversion with any sense of comfortable certainty. Conversion to what, exactly? Unless I know, I have to regard *Brideshead Revisited* as diminished in at least some slight way. And this flaw seems much more prominent than does the quality of Julia's and Marchmain's self-revelations, each of which appears credible if not inevitable.

The usual trouble experienced by many with *The End of the Affair* is also tied to the situation of religion in the modern world. Many have said, and Greene has implied agreement in at least one interview,⁷ that the miracles at the conclusion of the book are just too much to swallow.⁸ As I read the Greene interview, he does not precisely reject the idea of miracles in novels, but he does imply that he ended the book too suddenly for the miracles to have their realistic effect. It is true that the miracles occupy only the last forty pages and do seem to accumulate suddenly rather than gradually: perhaps Greene could have protracted them to better advantage. Nonetheless, I think several observations are in order on this subject.

For one thing, Greene does a fine job of having Bendrix try to regard certain events as coincidences rather than as miracles—a realistic impulse anticipating readers' embarrassment or even rancor. What Bendrix particularly shares with Ryder is an antireligious streak more pronounced than that of most readers, it seems likely. Thus when Ryder and Bendrix accept the truth of religion many readers, as we have said, feel betrayed—which effect is precisely the one sought by these writers, and therefore is a mark of artistic success. Moreover, this reversal implies that objections are not to the rate of the possible miracles' occurrence, but to the fact of their occurring at all. One may

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reasonably doubt that objectors would have been moved by a slower pace, although of course the present pace makes it impossible to know how a slower pace would have been received.

Another point about these concluding events is that they help to establish a bit of orthodoxy that Bendrix has picked up between 1946 and 1949. Addressing God as lower-case "you," sometime during the writing of this narrative, but prior to his use of the upper-case "You" on the final page (EA, p. 240), Bendrix shows that he has done some formal studying of Catholicism in the years since Sarah's death: "I believe in magic even less that I believe in you; magic is your cross, your resurrection of the body, your holy Catholic church, your communion of saints" (EA, p. 206). The communion of saints is the doctrine according to which prayer can effect communication among the souls of heaven, those in purgatory, and those on earth. This observation makes the novel neither better nor worse artistically, but it may assist some to understand what Greene is showing to have become part of Bendrix's more recent consciousness. Bendrix talks to Sarah after her death, and asks her to help him help another—he *prays* to Sarah. When he is thereafter able to avoid the situation out of which he had asked to be helped, he has difficulty thinking of before-and-after as just coincidental, as not cause-and-effect. He has the same trouble dealing with two instances of healing that are associated with Sarah and that occur after her death and indubitably after (if not as results of) her involvement direct or indirect.

Greene needs these possible miracles so that evidence of Sarah's virtue and love can hit Bendrix and the reader as realists—as seekers after material evidence (like Marchmain's sign of the cross)—and not be merely dismissed (by the fair-minded reader) as imaginary or hallucinatory. Whether or not the events following Sarah's cremation are miracles, they are useful to Bendrix's realistic writing in that they show *others*—Smythe and Parkis, the atheist and the pragmatic detective—to be aware of Sarah's intervention on the realistic level. Both Bendrix and the reader therefore have more nearly objective obstacles to overcome if they wish to think of these events as coincidence.

The point of these observations on the Greene novel is that what matters is how the first-person narrator-protagonist takes the events of his life, rather than how we might take them aside from the novel. The events do not occur apart from the novel—and the novel is the central character's narrated experience. If he thinks Sarah and their love for each other to be more alive than ever after she has died, and if he

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presents the grounds on which he thinks so, then the reader's job is only to absorb his psychology—not to fight it or kneel before it. In my opinion, Bendrix's psychology is very successfully conveyed. Like that of Ryder, it is rooted in physical love at the start, and then grows—against resistance—into the undeniable conviction that what held and holds Sarah and Bendrix together is a love that, being infinite at the source, cannot end. Just as Sarah's image of the desert shifts from symbolizing a vacuum at the end of her affair to symbolizing her sense of the infinitude of love, so Bendrix's need to hate and to believe Sarah dead fails. He experiences the power of Leon Bloy's words, which are Greene's epigraph: "Man has places in his heart which do not yet exist, and into them enters suffering, in order that they may have existence." Suffering, not happiness, is at the heart of these novels.

I think that the two books make this point artistically—that the psychology of Ryder and Bendrix as lovers makes sense, on the realistic level, of their eventual conversions to different notions of what love and truth mean. And I do not know how much further a novelist might be able to go in the direction of conveying supernatural *reality* (as distinct from wishful-think or consciously metaphorical make-believe).⁹ These two writers have gone very far indeed, all the while remembering that they were writing novels instead of treatises or sermons. Irrespective of whatever flaws one may note, to have done so much constitutes achievement of the highest sort.

¹ If it is asked why Ryder and Bendrix write, or whether they write in order to convert readers, I can reply only that they seem to me to be writing for the same reasons that motivate other first-person narrators—such as Huck Finn or Holden Caulfield or Jane Eyre: to make explicit for themselves and us what exactly happened in their lives, and to suggest the human universal applicability of their experiences. Presumably, *any* first-person narrator intends to change or "convert" the reader in this sense.

² Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, rev. ed. (1945; rev. 1960; Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1962), and Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair* (New York: Viking, 1951). Page references will be to these editions and will be included parenthetically in the text, cited as *BR* and *EA*, respectively.

³ On the subject of Ryder's dying romantic idealism, see my article "Varieties of Death Wish: Evelyn Waugh's Central Theme," *Criticism*, 14 (Winter 1972), esp. pp. 69–72.

⁴ Particularly perceptive on the structure and temporal sequence of *Brideshead Revisited* is Carl Wootton, "Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*: War and Limited Hope," *Midwest Quarterly*, 10 (Summer 1969), 359–75.

⁵ These incidents have triggered the principal specific objections to the role of Catholicism in this book. See Martin Stannard, ed., *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical*

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Heritage (London: Routledge, 1984), pp. 7–9 and 34–38, for a separation of the “camps” among critics of *Brideshead Revisited*. These “camps” are in general those which find Waugh’s treatment of Catholicism in violation of his practice as a novelist, and those which find that treatment of religion to be in keeping with the novelist’s art or even a means of enhancing that art.

Beyond these summary pages, Stannard includes excerpts from *contra* and *pro* critics. Among the *contras* may be found Brigid Brophy, who remarks that “1945 is the year Waugh ended” (p. 161). The anonymous *TLS* reviewer regrets Waugh’s “too obviously preconceived idea” (pp. 233–36). Henry Reed admires the book but thinks Waugh’s faith precludes concern for the feelings of nonbelievers (pp. 239–41). Edmund Wilson famously abhors and disbelieves the Catholic theme (pp. 245–48). Rose Macaulay, like Wilson, wants the earlier comic Waugh and dislikes the lushness of Julia’s and Marchmain’s monologues. She says that Waugh is a victim of “the pleasures of adolescent surrender to glamour,” and that he is parochial in reducing good to what is Catholic (pp. 253–55). Donat O’Donnell (Conor Cruise O’Brien) says Waugh’s book is full of romanticism, humiliation, nostalgia, snobbery, Toryism, and “love of money” as a “preliminary form of the love of God” (pp. 255–63). David Pryce-Jones says that Waugh is “a social Philistine,” and that “Catholicism saved Waugh from politics”: his religious views merely spread hatred of the modern world, whereas politics might have enabled him to make a difference in the world (pp. 272–76).

Among the *pros* may be listed V. C. Clinton-Baddeley, who sees the societal-eternal theme (pp. 237–38). John K. Hutchens also sees Waugh’s attempt on particular and universal levels, and sees trouble ahead for the book (pp. 241–45). Finally, Stannard reprints Waugh’s 1960 Preface to the revision, wherein Waugh admits to a too-lush style but gives no ground on the topic or use of his religious subject matter (pp. 271–72).

⁶ This is another key topic on which the book sinks or soars for numerous readers. Those who cite snobbery as damning include the following: Macaulay, pp. 253–55; Frank Kermode, pp. 279–87; Wilson, pp. 246–48; and O’Donnell, pp. 255–63: all in Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*. David Lodge, “Evelyn Waugh,” in George Stade, ed., *Six Modern British Novelists* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1974), p. 74. James F. Carens, *The Satiric Art of Evelyn Waugh* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1966), pp. 108–10. Frederick R. Karl, *A Reader’s Guide to the Contemporary English Novel* (New York: Farrar, 1962), pp. 176–77. Christopher Sykes, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), pp. 245–51. Kingsley Amis, “How I Lived in a Very Big House and Found God,” *TLS*, Nov. 20, 1981, p. 1352. Robert S. Powell, “Uncritical Perspective: Belief and Art in *Brideshead Revisited*,” *Critical Quarterly*, 22 (Autumn 1980), 58–65.

The contrary view is in one way or another supported by some. See Robert Murray Davis, *Evelyn Waugh, Writer* (Norman, Okla.: Pilgrim Books, 1981), p. 116. Frederick J. Stopp, *Evelyn Waugh: Portrait of an Artist* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1958), pp. 122–23.

⁷ See Frank Kermode, “The House of Fiction: Interviews with Seven Novelists,” in Malcolm Bradbury, ed., *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), pp. 117–19; reprinted from *Partisan Review*, 30 (Spring 1963).

⁸ Among those who find the miracles aesthetically offensive may be listed

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the following: John Spurling, *Graham Greene*. Contemporary Writers Series (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 45. "Shocker," *Time* (review), 58 (Oct. 29, 1951), 99. Ray Snape, "Plaster Saints, Flesh and Blood Sinners: Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*," *Durham University Journal*, 74 (June 1982), 243-46. Francis Wyndham, *Graham Greene*, Revised Ed., Writers and Their Work Series (London: Longmans, Green, 1962), p. 22. Walter Allen, *The Modern Novel in Britain and the United States* (New York: Dutton, 1965), pp. 206-07. Francis L. Kunkel, *The Labyrinthine Ways of Graham Greene*. Revised Expanded Edition (Mamaroneck, N.Y.: Paul P. Appel, 1973), pp. 129-32. R. W. B. Lewis, "The Fiction of Graham Greene: Between the Horror and the Glory," *Kenyon Review*, 19 (Winter 1957), 56. Ian Gregor and Brian Nicholas, *The Moral and the Story* (London: Faber, 1962), pp. 191-213. Morton Dauwen Zabel, "The Best and the Worst," in Samuel Hynes, ed., *Graham Greene: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 46.

⁹One of the first reviewers of Greene's book was, in my view, one of the very best. Anthony West, "Saint's Progress," *New Yorker*, 27 (Nov. 10, 1951), 154-60, saw *The End of the Affair* as "from first to last an almost faultless display of craftsmanship and a wonderfully assured statement of ideas" (p. 154). He also found the miracles powerful and convincing as a way to "bring home the reality of mystical experience." Finally, he thought the novel aesthetically moving (pp. 158-59).

Lawrence Durrell: Man and Writer

Durrell turned seventy-five on 27 February 1987, and received so many calls from well-wishers that he finally left the phone off the hook. Some of his old friends are among those who have written memoirs for this volume. Dr. Theodore Stephanides describes Lawrence Durrell and his wife Nancy in "The White House" on Corfu in the 1930s. Anne Ridler, assistant to T. S. Eliot at Faber and Faber, recalls her friendship with Larry at a time when he encouraged her writing, before she became recognized as an important poet. Catherine Aldington evokes Larry by the pool in Languedoc. Following the twenty personal reminiscences is a section that concentrates on Durrell the man: through his own letters, as observed and recorded by the BBC-TV producer Peter Adam during the filming of *Spirit of Place: Egypt*, and as interviewed by another friend, the psychologist Dr. Claudine Brelet. Indeed, the entire second section is *Durrell par lui même*: Durrell writing letters, previously unpublished, to T. S. Eliot and Henry Miller, Durrell in dialogue with John Hawkes, Durrell giving a glimpse of his work-in-progress, provisionally titled *Provence Entire*.

In this first of two volumes of *Twentieth Century Literature* devoted to Durrell are the building blocks of biography, the artifacts. Gerald Durrell, zoologist, naturalist, best-selling author and exuberant teaser of his older brother, isolates the spirit of fun that is so vivid a part of his brother's being. Alfred Perlès, the "third Musketeer" of the Durrell-Miller constellation that orbited around 18 Villa Seurat during the 1930s, credits Durrell with having saved him from the Wehrmacht. Diana Menuhin tells of her wartime visit (as a ballerina starring in *The Merry Widow*) to Alexandria and of her meeting with Larry. Raúl Victor Peláez remembers Durrell in Argentina during 1948. These and various other old friends recall what was moving, mad-cap, vital, exciting about their various encounters with Durrell over the years. What emerges is not hagiography but a series of snapshots of a personality with more facets than a cut gem, more angles and unexpected turnings than a labyrinth.

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We make no claim that these memoirs present a systematic biographical treatment, but offer them as coloring to the bare outlines of Durrell's life. He was born in Jullundur in northern India, surrounded by native servants and an extended family of mid-level civil servants and engineers. After eleven years in a dream of distant snows, with Everest visible from the foot of his bed in Darjeeling, with chanting Buddhist monks bowing to the robed Jesuits of his school, the young Lawrence was sent "Home" to England, to St. Olave's in Southwark, Chaucer's and Shakespeare's London, and to St. Edmund's, Canterbury. He rejected formal education as definitively as it rejected him: he dropped out of St. Edmund's after a year and he failed university entrance examinations. Lawrence's widowed mother, who had left India and settled in Bournemouth, propelled her restive son at eighteen to London with the injunction, "You can be as bohemian as you like, but *not in the house!*" Soon he met a lovely young Slade art student, Nancy Myers, the Nancy of Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals* and the N. of *Prospero's Cell*. He also rejected England and the tradition-bound literary establishment, standing atop the tower of Priory Church in Christchurch near Bournemouth with antiquarian bookseller Alan G. Thomas, "he looking toward the future, I back toward the past," as Thomas recalls this epiphany in both their lives.

By 1935 Durrell had come to detest every aspect of "Pudding Island," from its codes of behavior to its climate, and he cajoled and bullied his mother into moving with his three younger siblings to Corfu. There, Durrell met the Greek-English Dr. Theodore Stephanides, a true Renaissance man whose enormous erudition in natural history guided the eleven-year-old Gerry toward becoming the zoologist he is today, while Stephanides' acquaintance with such literary figures as George Seferis and George Katsimbalis helped ground Larry's writing and many important friendships in the Aegean world.

Durrell had written an apprentice novel before leaving England, and he completed another, *Panic Spring*, soon after arriving in Corfu. Then he read *Tropic of Cancer* and started corresponding with Henry Miller, an exchange that would continue virtually uninterrupted until Miller's death in 1980. Empowered by this contact, Durrell wrote his first significant novel, *The Black Book* (1938). By 1937 he had been drawn for the first of two pre-war stays to Paris, the Paris described here by Cecily Mackworth. Miller's circle accepted him at once: Alfred Perlès "gave him the accolade," Anaïs Nin let him read her cherished secret diaries, and the painter Betty Ryan, who lived in an apartment below Miller at 18 Villa Seurat, watched their carryings-on with quiet

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amazement. Buffie Johnson, another young American painter, enjoyed Durrell and some of the exotic characters he collected about him. Soon Anaïs, Larry, Henry, and Fred had launched myriad projects: they edited *The Booster* magazine, they published one another's books, they planned to buy a yacht and sail to Greece. . . . Larry virtually commuted between Paris and London, where he met T. S. Eliot, Tambimuttu, Havelock Ellis, and Dylan Thomas. Eliot and the young poet Anne Ridler became Durrell's editors at Fabers, while Thomas was to celebrate later reunions with Durrell with pints of ale and bouts of Welsh story-telling. Larry went back to Corfu in 1938 and again in 1939, the year Henry paid him the visit described in *The Colossus of Maroussi*. The gods had given Durrell his two most significant mentors: Eliot for poetry, Miller for prose. Durrell's warm feelings for these two men are reflected in the letters printed for the first time here.

The outbreak of war catapulted many Americans back to the United States, Perlès found refuge in England, and Larry, Nancy, and the infant Penelope barely escaped from Kalamata, Greece, three days ahead of the German army, in April 1941. In Egypt he found work with the British government, first in Cairo and then in Alexandria as head of the British Information Office. Egypt took in exiles from all over the Mediterranean, and the presence of a number of England's best young poets produced a small cultural flowering around *Personal Landscape*, the magazine Durrell, Keith Douglas, Bernard Spencer, Terence Tiller, Gwyn Williams, and others edited, contributed to, and published.

Despite the desert war which came so close to Alexandria that the flashes of explosions could be seen playing along the horizon, the lights in the city stayed lit and a rather gritty gaiety prevailed. Soldiers on a few days' leave came in from the desert or from special missions throughout the Mediterranean. Among those who became Durrell's enduring friends were Patrick Leigh Fermor and Xan Fielding, both fighting with Greek partisans on German-occupied islands. Nor did the civilians feel secure: when Rommel attacked El Alamein and seemed likely to overrun all Egypt, British dependents, among them Durrell's wife and daughter, were evacuated to Palestine. Their marriage was already under strain, and it ended in divorce when Nancy decided not to return.

When the German forces in the Dodecanese Islands surrendered, Durrell was sent as Public Information Officer to Rhodes, where among his duties was the publication of three newspapers, one each in Italian, Greek, and Turkish. As an assistant he managed to bring along the young woman he had been courting, Eve, "Cohen with her seven

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languages ... looking charming black and smooth," as Durrell described her to Miller. Always fortunate in making friends, Durrell soon found in Raymond Mills, the Chief Medical Officer of Rhodes, and his young Greek wife, Georgina, ideal companions for exploring the island. Mary Mollo was sent to Rhodes as a photojournalist, and she will never forget the excitement and the shared rigors of travelling the Dodecanese Islands on the open deck of a caique with Larry and Eve. He and Eve were married as soon as his divorce from Nancy came through, and they lived in the tiny Villa Cleobolus, facing several ranks of slender Turkish gravestones through a cheval-de-frise of bougainvilleae. This was also a productive time, for he finished *Prospero's Cell*, *Cities, Plains, and People*, and *The Dark Labyrinth* before leaving Rhodes in 1947.

Durrell had hoped to secure a post in Athens through the British Council, but when the Dodecanese Islands were returned to Greece and the British Military Authority was withdrawn, the Council offered him Argentina—or nothing. So the end of 1947 found him steaming into Buenos Aires, whence he travelled by train to the conservative provincial town of Córdoba. Despite the fact that, as Durrell claims, he "made marvellous friends"—Bebita and Jorge Ferreyra, who entertained him at their home outside Córdoba, the writer Enrique Revol, and Raúl Victor Peláez, a student at the "Asociación Argentina de Cultura Británica"—he was extravagantly miserable. The Pampero wind, "pure dust of the highest quality," Peláez terms it, oppressed him; the enormous Argentine steaks, "like loaves of bread," offended his war-rationed stomach, although he got fat eating them; he chafed under the demands of Council teaching. Most important, he was too far from the Mediterranean. He wrote out the lectures that would eventually be published as *A Key to Modern British Poetry*, terminated his two-year contract on medical grounds, and left December 1948 for England.

Was it a sign of forgiveness or malice that the British government sent him next to Belgrade? Almost immediately, Durrell was writing letters complaining about Marshall Tito's police state, about the "sodden Serbs," about temperatures as Siberian as Córdoba's had been torrid. He completed his drama *Sappho*, and when his second daughter was born in 1950, he named her after the Greek poet. By the end of 1952 he was back in the Mediterranean, in Cyprus, having, he hoped permanently, severed all connections with the Foreign Office. He was determined to live or starve by his writing. His foreign residence book, *Bitter Lemons*, tells the tragic story of the Greek agitation for the union

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of Cyprus with Greece, and of the part he was drafted to play: Press Officer, once again. His marriage with Eve broke up, he had to abandon his lovingly restored Turkish house in Bellapaix, and his duties made writing very difficult. By getting up at four in the morning and working in longhand because typing would awaken Sappho, he pushed *Justine* along a few paragraphs a day, and he wrote the poems that were published in *The Tree of Idleness*. Sappho joined her mother later in England, but there were many visitors: brother Gerry came to make a film, Paddy Leigh Fermor dropped by to sing Greek songs half the night, and the writer Freya Stark paused in her endless Middle Eastern peregrinations. With Durrell the last year in Cyprus was Claude Vincendon (whom he was to marry in 1961), an Alexandrian beauty he had *not* met while he was in Egypt. Together in the evenings they sat typing at opposite ends of a long table, the EOKA bombs rumbling near and far, he typing out *Justine* while she wrote the lively *Mrs. O'*, a novel based on her experiences as a pub-keeper in Ireland.

During the summer of 1956 Durrell quit the Foreign Service for the last time, and an old friend from his days in Athens, Diana Ladas, gave Larry and Claude the use of her Stone Cottage at Milkwell, Dorset, which they viewed as a way station before they settled in France. Mrs. Ladas introduced him to James and Tania Stern, living nearby at Tisbury, and they passed convivial hours together when Durrell was not hard at work writing *Bitter Lemons*, the emotional bruises of Cyprus still upon him.

By January 1957 Larry and Claude were prospecting for housing in the south of France; Durrell had written one of his acknowledged literary giants, Richard Aldington, asking advice, and this led to a meeting at Montpellier. Durrell's correspondence with Aldington runs in volume second only to his exchanges with Henry Miller, although with the exception of one letter written in 1933 it extended only from 1957 until Aldington's death in July 1962. Richard's daughter Catherine has remained a close friend. Along with good advice which led to the establishment of Larry and Claude in the rented Villa Louis in Sommières, Aldington introduced them to Frédéric-Jacques Temple, who was to prove a loyal companion and a guide to Languedoc life. It was in the Villa Louis that Durrell wrote *Balthazar* and *Mountolive* at terrific speed.

There were to be only two other moves, up to the present, for Durrell. In the autumn of 1958 Larry and Claude bought the Mazet Michel, a peasant farmhouse near Nîmes, where he finished *The Alexandria Quartet*, his plays *Acte* and *An Irish Faustus*, and *The Ikons*, a

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collection of poems. The Mazet became a stopping point for Durrell's many friends: Fielding, Leigh Fermor, Miller, Mills, Anaïs Nin, Perlès were among those who came to sit on the terrace under the vines. In 1965 Claude found a three-story *maison de ville* for sale at the edge of Sommières, and Durrell moved to his present home, to the large dark house under the chestnuts and palms, with owls floating by and nightingales singing in the evenings. They had been in the refurbished new home less than a year when Claude's health declined, and she was sent to Geneva for treatment where she died, tragically young, on New Year's Day, 1967.

As the publishing record tells us, Durrell has continued to work, and work hard and well: *Tunc* and *Nunquam* (*The Revolt of Aphrodite* novels) represent a break from the romantic flights of the *Quartet*; and the volumes of *The Avignon Quintet* (*Monsieur, Livia, Constance, Sebastian, Quinx*) show the mastery of a Prospero in firm command. Durrell has become more than ever a Continental European presence, lecturing at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, filming a BBC-Bavarian Television production, *The Lonely Roads*, with Margaret McCall, being interviewed in French by his psychologist friend Dr. Caudine Brelet, and conversing on André Pivot's "Apostrophe" television program, the pinnacle of French literary culture over the wavebands. It cost Durrell enormous effort to recover from Claude's death, and he began a series of travels: to Greece, to the United States in 1968, 1970, 1971, and 1972. On most of these trips he visited Miller in California, and in 1974 he accepted a three-month assignment as an Andrew W. Mellon Visiting Professor at the California Institute of Technology, mainly so he could be near his old friend. With his new wife Ghislaine de Boysson he lived on the beach at Malibu, an odd fish in Hollywood waters. However, he re-established ties with Anaïs Nin, then living in Los Angeles, and the *vieux copains* of the Villa Seurat enjoyed several grand reunions. In 1975 the BBC producer Peter Adam lured Durrell to Greece to film the first of two *Spirit of Place* films. In the pages that follow Adam shares with us his sympathetic, honest, and astute observations on Durrell in Egypt during 1977.

Durrell did not return to America until 1986, when he came, alone and unmarried once more, for a conference at Pennsylvania State University devoted to his writing, the fourth such to be held in the country since 1980. His conversation with John Hawkes at the Durrell conference forms a part of this volume. Now Lawrence Durrell is back in Sommières, completing his book on Provence, receiving his friends, emitting that personal magic, at once warm, human, and psychic, that

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has garnered such loyalty and such affection over the years. Long may he flourish!

Ian S. MacNiven & Carol Peirce
New York & Baltimore, 1987

My Brother Larry

BY GERALD DURRELL

In writing about my brother Larry I realise that I am treading upon dangerous ground. I once wrote a book in which he was one of the central characters, and my portrait of him was intended to be an affectionate and, I hoped, humourous lampoon. To my chagrin it was treated in certain quarters as a vicious attack on him. So much so that one literary giant (and a great fan of Larry's) asked him whether he intended to "reply" to it. Larry's answer was characteristic: he solemnly assured the person that he had challenged me to a duel in Hyde Park, but, as my choice of weapons had been cobras, to which he had always had a strange aversion, he had been forced to call the whole thing off.

Larry as a writer I would not presume to criticise; Larry as a leg-puller, as a humorist and as a talker I can speak about with a certain amount of authority. In argument he is so deft and slick that within minutes he will have you wallowing helplessly, finding to your amazement that you are trying desperately to defend a position which you were under the impression you had set out to attack.

He suffers fools a little less than gladly, and will, if driven far enough, suddenly produce from his armoury of words a sentence like a rapier that will successfully silence them. At a cocktail party once he had endured the attentions of a typical fly-brained female gin-vulture for half an hour or so with considerable good humour. But then she made the fatal mistake of asking him about his work. Was he, she inquired feverishly, writing anything at the moment? This is tantamount to asking a doctor if he is doing any curing at the moment. Reluctantly Larry admitted that he was at work on a book. Anybody less crocodile-skinned would have left it there, but she plunged on with dumb enthusiasm. Titles were so important, didn't he think? What was his new book to be called? Larry had had enough. "I'm going to call it: NOT NOW. . . . MY HUSBAND'S LOOKING."

MY BROTHER LARRY

He has the most extraordinary ability for giving people faith in themselves. Throughout my life he has provided me with more enthusiastic encouragement than anyone else, and any success I have achieved is due, in no small measure, to his backing. This sort of verbal tonic that he dispenses does not only work for me. I remember once staying in a hotel in London where Larry came to visit me, thoughtfully bearing under his arm a bottle of brandy. We sat in the decaying Victorian lounge with the night porter and attacked the bottle. Within five minutes Larry, by adroit questioning, had discovered that this individual had a secret desire to go on a bicycle tour of Africa but was doubtful whether he would ever achieve this ambition. Larry, distressed at such a weak-kneed attitude, went to work. For half an hour he talked with such infectious enthusiasm about touring Africa on a bicycle that you would have thought his one ambition in life was to undertake such a trip himself. My feeble attempts to point out one or two fallacies in his argument ("Water's easy to get in the Sahara if you know where to look.") were brushed aside. By the time he had finished, not only the night porter, but I myself, was convinced that the most enchanting, desirable and easy thing in the world to do was a bicycle tour of the Dark Continent. By the time Larry left, the night porter was already settling down to the task of making lists of the equipment he would need (puncture outfit, spare inner tube), his eyes glowing with enthusiasm. As far as I know he is still a night porter, but for a couple of glorious hours he had been Stanley, Livingston, Richard Burton and Cecil Rhodes all rolled into one.

Larry is not only generous with his enthusiasm but also with his worldly goods. I remember once we went into a pub in Soho and met there a very seedy and down-at-heel poet, who was violently distressed at not having had anything published for the past year. The fact that the man was a bad poet did not daunt Larry at all; for an hour he gave the poet the full treatment, and at the end had him glowing with self-confidence. To round it off Larry—at that time desperately short of money himself—wrote him out a cheque for five pounds to tide him over. Although he is himself careful with money, he is exceedingly generous, never lending but giving—on occasions to his own detriment. He came to spend last Christmas with me at my Zoo in Jersey, and fell deeply in love with our lion. He questioned me carefully about caging, and I said that, although the cage for the lion was adequate, it was not as large as we would like. When the Zoo could afford it we were going to build a large cage for him and get him a mate. Shortly after Larry left he sent me a cheque "to build a new cage for the lion." These are the

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first signs of an interest in Natural History which I will, of course, try to foster.

Larry's ability to laugh at himself is, I think, one of his best characteristics. I paid him a visit when he was Director of Information in Cyprus after the war, and found him taking an enthusiastic interest in the new block of offices that were under construction to house his department. The great day came when they entered the new building, and I paid him a visit to see this office which he had been so eagerly awaiting. I found him in this palatial room, seated behind a desk the size of a billiard table, opening his mail. He looked very much the big business tycoon, and I was suitably impressed. Then he opened a letter from his publishers and sighed lugubriously. "My last volume of poetry has just earned me five pounds eleven and six," he said; "I shall have to watch it or I'll be up to six pounds before I know *where* I am." My first book, when it was published, came out simultaneously with a book of his, both of them produced by the same publisher. They plastered a proud advertisement in all the Sunday newspapers which read: GLORIOUS PRESS FOR THE BROTHERS DURRELL. Larry, when I showed this to him, read it carefully and then looked at me solemnly. "Congratulations," he said, "we are now a circus act; clad in sequined tights, three hundred foot above the ring; you will fling yourself into space, while I, hanging by my knees, will attempt to focus my bleary eyes sufficiently quickly to catch you by the ankles as you sweep past."

He has the ability which great talkers such as Wilde and Sidney Smith must have had to take a very ordinary happening and, by skillful embroidery, by a twist of viewpoint, and with a handful of similes, turn it into something that leaves you helpless with laughter. His description of how he was going to publicise one of the *Alexandria Quartet* volumes by having my mother (aged seventy-five), clad in a leopard-skin bikini, ride a camel through Trafalgar Square, was such a masterpiece of farce that you felt, when he had finished, that you had actually witnessed the event.

I had a secretary once who was terrified of meeting Larry, though I did my best to persuade her that he was not an ogre. When the vital meeting came about, I knew there would be nothing to fear since she was excessively pretty with green eyes, auburn hair and a peaches and cream complexion. Larry took one look at her and immediately turned on fifty million volts of charm, assuring her that Titian must be revolving in his grave at having been denied the chance of painting her. For a couple of hours he gave her his undivided attention while drinking vast quantities of my wine. When he finally left, I said to her,

MY BROTHER LARRY

"There, that wasn't so bad, was it?" "Oh, no," she said, ecstatically, "not bad, but tell me, does he always talk in 3D?"

His ability as a talker is, I think, nicely summed up by a young woman who, when he was visiting us at Christmas time, had sat enraptured at his feet for three hours, listening to him talk. When I asked her what he had been talking about her reply showed the sort of spell that Larry can cast:

"I don't know what he talked about," she said, "but I wouldn't have missed a word of it."

First Meeting with Lawrence Durrell; and, The House at Kalami

BY THEODORE STEPHANIDES

In the late autumn of 1934, I was hunting one afternoon for mushrooms in the olive woods around Analypsis and Kanoni, a region of Corfu where *Psalliota campestris* (field mushroom) and *Psalliota arvensis* (horse mushroom) were very plentiful. I suddenly came upon a thin and very tall young man with a short dark-brown beard and a very pleasant face. He asked me in English what I was doing and seemed to take it just as a matter of course when I answered in the same language. We immediately struck up an acquaintance and a friendship which was to last until George Wilkinson's (for that was his name) death in the winter of 1968. On that occasion we continued the walk together and George afterwards invited me to tea at the little villa he was living in on the road from Corfu town to Kanoni. He introduced me also to his wife, Pamela, a pretty blonde whom he had just married before leaving England.

It was George who first spoke to me of his friends the Durrells, whom he hoped to persuade to come and live in Corfu. Sure enough,

Readers of Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals* will need no introduction to Dr. Theodore Stephanides, first guide in zoology and, it is not blasphemous to suggest, patron saint of the renowned naturalist. Less widely known is his long friendship with Lawrence Durrell, whom he generously assisted in various literary endeavors, including *Prospero's Cell* and the translation of *Pope Joan*. What follow are passages from the late Dr. Stephanides' (he died in 1983) notebooks. This memoir first appeared in *Deus Loci: The Lawrence Durrell Newsletter*, 1, No. 1 (September 1977). It is reprinted here with the kind permission of Alexia Stephanides Mercouris, literary executor of the Estate of Theodore Stephanides.

THE HOUSE AT KALAMI

early in the summer of 1935, George and Pam invited me to lunch and afterwards we all three walked to the Villa Agazini, where the Durrells (who had just lately arrived in Corfu) lived, in time for tea.

The Villa Agazini (the "Strawberry-pink Villa" of Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals*) was situated just above the road from Perama to Benitsa about four kilometres south of Corfu town. During a very pleasant tea, I was introduced to the Durrell clan, which included old Mrs. Louisa Durrell, Leslie, Margaret and Gerald; also Roger, a large and friendly black dog of rather uncertain pedigree.

Lawrence and Nancy turned up soon after tea. I do not remember now if they were actually living in the somewhat cramped quarters of the Villa Agazini or if they still had a room for themselves at the "Pension Suisse" in town. What first struck me on meeting Lawrence was his jauntiness and self-assurance (a quality I have always lacked); also his bubbling energy. He seemed to be in every corner of the little house at once, throwing off advice and suggestions like a machine gun and arranging to undertake everything from the arrangement of the furniture to the planting out of the garden.

It was this abounding energy and self-assurance which always seemed to me the keynote of Lawrence's character. From the very beginning he was determined to become a great writer. He was quite certain that he would be one and, after I had known him for a short while, I was equally convinced that he would succeed in his aim.

A month or two after I knew them, the Durrell family, including Lawrence and Nancy, all transferred to the much larger Villa Anemoyanni (Gerald's "Daffodil-yellow Villa") situated on the coast road about four kilometres north of Corfu town, at a place called Sotiriotissa near Govino (Gouvía) Bay. This delightful villa was situated in extensive and almost completely wild grounds planted with cypress and olive trees and thickly overgrown with clumps of arbutus and other shrubs. Larry and Nancy had a bright and airy room with two large windows partly shaded in summer by a climbing vine which covered part of one side of the house. In a very short while this room became cluttered up with typewriters (really only one), books, dictionaries, files and manuscript sheets which, as usual, soon overflowed into every nook and corner. Lawrence and his mother were always locked in a perpetual battle. She was always determined that she really must tidy up his room, and Lawrence was equally determined that she should not. An example of an irresistible force encountering an immovable obstacle!

But it was not a case of all work and no play with Lawrence—not by any means. Besides boating and sea-bathing whenever the season

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permitted (or even when it didn't), Lawrence was always ready, and eager, to join in any kind of boisterous game, the rougher the better. There was a little wooded knoll at one end of the grounds which we had christened "the fort." We would often divide ourselves into two opposing "armies," one consisting (say) of Lawrence, Leslie and one of the local gardener's sons, and the other of Gerald, myself and the gardener's other son, and we would have tremendous pitched battles, one side defending and the other side trying to storm "the fort." For weapons we had long feathery cypress boughs which could give a stinging but not a harmful blow (sticks, of course, were not allowed) and for missiles we had cypress cones and clods of dry friable earth which burst on impact like a bomb. The cypress cones were old ones which were fairly light and we were not supposed to aim at the face, but occasionally accidents (none serious) did happen, and we all of us, including Lawrence, did turn up at tea with a bruise or two or even a black eye. But I can still remember with a thrill after all those years how we all enjoyed tearing around, shouting and yelling and throwing cypress cones and earth clods at each other, although Lawrence was 24 and I 40 years old at the time! I wonder if Lawrence Durrell's many admirers could picture such an undignified scene *now*! And what is more, some of Lawrence's friends, who came out to Corfu from time to time, would suddenly find themselves conscripted into one of the contesting armies and plunged into a battle when they had expected a quiet cup of tea under a vine-covered trellis. I think that some of them did not show the same enthusiasm that we ourselves did.

Some time early in 1936, Lawrence and Nancy and I were invited to spend the day at the house of Mrs. Gennatas at Kouloura on the east coast some 14 kilometres north of Corfu town as the crow flies, but very much longer by road.

Spyros Chalikiopoulos (Spyros the Chauffeur) drove us there in his battered but very serviceable old American car—a Cadillac if I remember right. The road was very bad and we were bumped up and down like peas in a saucepan, but the scenery was some of the most beautiful in Corfu with the blue Ionian on our right and the abrupt rocks of 900-metres-high Mt. Pandokrator on our left. It was a beautiful spring day and Mrs. Gennatas' house was looking its best. It was a very old one-storied building, a Venetian look-out fortalice in the old days, with immensely thick walls which had formerly been loopholed for defence, but which were now pierced by wide French windows opening out on a wide stone terrace overlooking the sea. The small, almost circular bay from which the little fishing village got its name (Kouloura

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= ring) lay in front of us crowded with small fishing caïques and rowboats. We were served a real old-fashioned tea with seed cakes (but no muffins) and delicious village-made brown bread and some excellent local honey. The milk was goat's, as there was no pasture for cows in the rocky north part of the island, but that made the meal all the more interesting in spite, or rather because, of the unusual flavour. Afterwards we sat and chatted with old Mrs. Gennatas who, curious to say, spoke English with a slight Liverpool accent—I don't know if she herself had ever lived in that town or if she had learnt her English from someone who had. Anyway she was able to give us many details and anecdotes of the Corfu she had known as a child. It was with regret that we left and were driven back by Spyros who was able to pick his way along the road more by the bright moonlight than by his ancient and rather dim head lights.

The upshot of this excursion was that Lawrence and Nancy were so delighted with the countryside around Kouloura that they decided that they would rent a couple of rooms in some peasant cottage there at the earliest opportunity. "And what's more," announced Lawrence, "it will be much easier to work there in peace and quiet than where I am now surrounded by a pack of brats who are all the time rushing about and yelling their heads off!"

Spyros the Chauffeur, ever resourceful, announced that he knew everybody around Kouloura and that he would soon find a suitable house. "Don't you worries, Larrys," he rumbled in his deep bass, "I'll soon fixes it!" Spyros was as good as his word and some ten days later, Lawrence announced to his weeping (?) family that he and Nancy were going to live by themselves in two rooms that Spyros had found for them in a peasant house on the sea at Kalami. Kalami was a tiny fishing village of some four or five cottages only (at that time), separated from Kouloura only by a jutting headland. Lawrence and Nancy had inspected the place a few days previously and declared themselves satisfied. Kalami had all the advantages of solitude without being *too* much cut off. A rough but passable path connected it to the main road, and thus to Spyros and his car. Also, about one and a half kilometres to the south was a slightly larger fishing village, Agni, also connected by a path, where twice a week, weather permitting, a small diesel-engined caïque would arrive from Corfu town and return on the same day. This caïque would even sometimes call at Kalami "on request" and transport furniture or any other bulky objects that the Durrells might have bought in town.

I stayed several times with Lawrence and Nancy at Kalami and I

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can even pin-point one of these visits by looking up my astronomical notebook: it was from the 2nd to the 29th August 1936. It was from their Kalami house that I made most of my observations of Peltier's Comet, 1936.

The house that Spyros had found for the Durrells was the largest one in Kalami and belonged to Athenaios and his wife Eleni. Athenaios was a slight, rather pale man (from my recollection) with dark hair, a small dark moustache and a very quiet, composed and polite manner. I don't think that I ever saw him excited or put out during the time that I knew him. His wife also looked rather like him both in physique and manners. She generally wore dark working peasant clothes with a white coif round her head; whilst her husband generally appeared in his shirt-sleeves with a dark grey (if I remember right) shirt and trousers. Both of them usually went about bare foot or in thick hob-nailed village-made shoes. I do not remember what Athenaios' work was. He seemed to be able to do everything from building a house to laying down night-lines and lobster pots.

The house itself was very solidly built, most of it from stone from the beach, and whitewashed a brilliant white. Athenaios claimed to have built most of it himself and I think that this was true. It was one-storied (at that period) and built on a cluster of rocks, the largest of which formed a sort of flat plateau about ten or fifteen feet above sea level (tides are negligible in the Mediterranean and Ionian Seas). The house was built on this plateau and was surrounded on nearly three sides by the sea. Athenaios had also built a kind of davit from which hung the small boat he used for fishing. The boat looked rather rough and ready, and it is quite possible that he had built it also.

The house was quite roomy inside and possessed at least three bedrooms, a kitchen, a dining-room and a quite respectable loo—something which quite surprised me for a peasant house. The Durrells had rented two of the three bedrooms (one for sleeping and the other for working) with rights to the kitchen and dining room where they used all to meet sometimes in the evening together with any other of the villagers who cared to drop in. On these occasions Eleni would brew innumerable tiny cups of Turkish coffee and Athenaios would hand around little glasses of wine or *ouzo* (currant alcohol flavoured with aniseed). Lawrence and Nancy would generally hand around something out of a tin (biscuits, chocolate, etc.) which, in those days, was a much appreciated novelty. English cigarettes were also much appreciated, though gin or whisky did not ring the bell. Each of the guests, however, brought a bottle of wine from his own particular vineyard so that

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drinkables were usually more than sufficient. At first my services as interpreter were rather in demand, but it was amazing how soon Lawrence and Nancy picked up Greek. On subsequent visits I discovered that they understood the local brand of patois better than I did myself!

It was lucky that these "salons" were not too frequent as otherwise Lawrence's search for "peace and quiet" would have been defeated. But, on the whole, except for the sound of the sea and the distant crow of the village cock, one could not have found a quieter place. Athenaios, Eleni and their daughter (about twelve years old if my memory is correct) were quietness itself. I do not know where they slept. During my visits they must have taken up their abode in one of the outhouses or sheds or gone to live with some neighbour, as they used to insist on my occupying the third room which had not been rented by the Durrells.

I can still remember very vividly the lovely summer nights when a sea breeze had cooled the air and we sat on the rocks just above the sea, looking up at the bright stars and listening to the low rustle of the waves all around us. On such occasions we would talk and give our opinions on every subject under the sun. Or else we would just sit and think and soak in the feeling of the night. It was probably on one of these occasions that Lawrence thought of the idea of having an extra storey built to the house so that he could still enjoy a similar experience when the weather grew too cold to sit in the open. And also, no doubt, so as to have more room for his ever-accumulating books and manuscripts which already threatened to crowd him right out of house and home.

With Lawrence's usual exuberance, he immediately put this proposition to Athenaios, who did not seem very enthusiastic at first. But Lawrence swept him off his feet with a flood of arguments, pointing out that *he* would make all the architectural plans, that *he* would help in the building and that *he* would pay all the expenses so that Athenaios would remain in the end with a brand new upper floor to his house at absolutely no cost to himself. Lawrence, of course, knew absolutely nothing about architecture or house-building and his bank balance (in those far-off days) would not have caused a tax-collector to leap with joy, but his sublime self-assurance triumphed over all obstacles. Soon he had convinced Athenaios and, on one of my subsequent visits, I found that the work of building the new upper storey had actually begun. I do not know if Lawrence had drawn up any plans, but Athenaios did not seem to need them as he could, apparently, get on all right by rule of thumb. With the aid of one of his cronies from

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the village and a small boy, who seemed to do nothing else but carry pails of water, Athenaios performed wonders and the floor seemed almost to grow before our eyes.

I do not know if Lawrence did much manual labour, but he certainly buzzed around with plenty of suggestions and advice. He repeatedly told Athenaios, "I want two *big* windows that will take up almost the whole of the wall facing the sea. I insist on two *big* windows. I must have two *big* windows so that I can look out on the sea and feel as if I were actually riding the waves. Two *big* windows, mind you: each one must extend from here to here. See, I'm marking it so that there should be no mistake. Two *big* wide windows. If I can't have two *big* windows I shall just get up and leave and you'll never see me again!"

Each time Athenaios would explain, very gently and patiently, that two *big* windows would be delightful for the summer. But as soon as winter came with an icy east wind blowing over the snow-clad mainland mountains, the occupants of the upper storey would freeze. Also, during winter storms, waves were sometimes blown right against the house walls and big windows would soon be stove in. But Lawrence waved this specious excuse aside. He had to have *big* windows, or else. Athenaios ceased to argue.

At about this time, Lawrence and Nancy left Kalami for some time. I even think that they left Corfu for several months and that they went to Paris. Anyway, he left strict instructions with Athenaios about the *big* windows as the extra floor was scheduled to be ready for occupation on his return. When the pair returned to Corfu, I drove out with them in Spyros' car to see their long-expected new home. As we descended by the winding mountain path, we could see in the distance that the house was ready with its extra storey all whitewashed and tile-roofed. I marvelled how Athenaios could have accomplished all that work in such a short time—it was quite clear that he did not belong to any trade union. We finally reached the beach and could see part of the seaward side of the house. Then a roar of rage burst from Lawrence when it became evident that, although Athenaios had been worsted in *argument*, he had had the advantage of carrying out the *work* of building. The seaward aspect of the upper storey had two *small* windows!

I have rarely seen Lawrence more indignant and upset. At first he wanted to turn right round and return to the car and leave Kalami for ever. It was with great difficulty that Nancy and I persuaded him to change his mind. But for many weeks, even after the upper floor had been made into a beautiful and comfortable home, he would scarcely speak to Athenaios. But they made it up after the first few *real* autumn

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gales had amply proved that Athenaios' point of view had not been absolutely wrong and that it was extremely problematical if the upper floor could have been lived in if the two *big* windows had actually been installed.

Incidentally, I learnt later that Gerald's menagerie of scorpions (see *My Family and Other Animals*) and other fearsome creatures was one of the causes of Lawrence's decision to live in the far north of the island—the farther the better. It was, he said, the episode of the leeches that finally broke his nerve. I had helped Gerald one afternoon to collect some medicinal leeches (*Hirudo medicinalis*) which he took home in a wide-mouthed glass jar. These were magnificent specimens, about 75 mm (3 inches) long, with a bright longitudinal red and green stripe on each side of the body. The next day, unfortunately, this jar got knocked off the table and broken. The leeches disappeared and could not be found anywhere. Lawrence gave me a harrowing description of how he lay awake night after night feeling leeches crawling all over him and expecting to find the bedsheets drenched with crimson blood in the morning. Had I known of this tragedy at the time, I could have reassured him. Out of its usual element, the medicinal leech shrivels up and dies within an hour or less. It could not have roamed about the house unless the rooms were more or less under water—a condition which most people would no doubt have noticed even if the question of leeches had never arisen!

Montparnasse and 18 Villa Seurat

BY CECILY MACKWORTH

One has to begin somewhere. There is a choice to be made: this moment or that, memory laid out like a map, with a flag-pin to mark: it began here, or there. Yet, looking back, I can see that every beginning has also been an end—the end of childhood, the end of adolescence, the end of the world as I knew it in early youth. . . . The day, for instance, when I stood with Jeanne Bucher on the balcony of her art gallery in the boulevard Montparnasse and heard the distant thudding of guns in the eastern suburbs. Her stern old face had turned quite white and she said in a low clear voice, speaking straight out into the air, “Now God is dead.”

That seems to me as good an end, or as good a beginning, as any that can be dredged up from the past. The world was toppling into chaos, as it has done so many times in the course of history, and then rearranged itself laboriously into some kind of order. This time, though, I was watching it happening, conscious, though still in a somewhat confused way, that a familiar country lay at my back and a new, still uncharted one was opening up in front of me.

It was not mere chance that had dropped me at that precise moment on that balcony in Montparnasse. Something had brought me to Paris first, though what it was is difficult to determine without going further and further back. Wanting to discover Love and Art, wanting to escape . . . finding instead loneliness. Those cheap *pensions de famille*; those grim-faced assistants at the Sorbonne, asking for certificates I did

This chapter from Cecily Mackworth's *Ends of the World* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1987) has been included in its entirety, with the kind permission of the author, because, while not exclusively about Durrell, it describes the particular Paris ambience so vital to his artistic development.

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not possess; a Montparnasse full of worried Jews escaped from Hitler's Germany, nothing like the romantic Bohemia of so many memoirs.

Dazed by the beauty of Paris, I wandered alone by the banks of the Seine, watching Flemish barges gliding in from the north, and patient fishermen angling for sprats. I sat in Notre-Dame, eyes fixed on the cardinals' hats dangling above the high altar. When one of them dropped, someone had told me, the cardinal's soul would be freed from purgatory but this never happened in my presence. I went to the Surrealist Exhibition and saw artificial rain dropping on a crocodile seated in the back of a battered old motor-car. I went several times to Sylvia Beach's bookshop, Shakespeare & Co., near the carrefour de l'Odéon and once to Adrienne Monnier's French bookshop just opposite. Maybe I saw famous writers there. Maybe Ernest Hemingway was there, ruffling through the pages of his own works, or James Joyce, sulking in a corner. If I did see them I didn't recognize them. I met a few artists too—elegant little Viera da Silva, whose canvases were all tiny blobs of colour, brilliant as jewels; her husband, Arpad Szenes, who told me stories of a brief moment in the history of Hungary when artists had been the true kings of his country; William Hayter, whose engravings were so icily perfect that it seemed there was nothing to be said about them: people, places, happenings, all seemed to be part of a country through whose guarded frontiers I peered with little hope of ever crossing them.

One afternoon—it was late in the summer of 1937—I drifted into a picture gallery in Montparnasse, simply because I had nowhere special to go. A young man strolled in the empty room— eyes the colour of wintry water and an appearance so insignificant that he might have served as a model for one of those Le Carré spies who did not yet exist. We talked; he said he was a painter; I told him I wanted to write. He gave me an icy stare and said, "You must meet Henry Miller."

He led me at a brisk pace down the boulevard Raspail, round by the great bronze Lion of Belfort, and into the rue de la Tombe Issoire in the fourteenth arrondissement, which was then a long, dingy street, full of shops selling ironmongery, artificial silk underwear and cheap stationery. The Villa Seurat opened off it—a cul-de-sac, blocked by trees at one end and bordered with low houses and tiny gardens with flowering shrubs sprouting through iron railings. It was like the décor for a Balzac novel, but in fact it was inhabited almost entirely by various kinds of artists and intellectuals. Approaching, we could hear subdued sounds of their activities—tapping of a sculptor's hammer, bursts of

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Mozart, clatter of typewriters. "Ubac and Soutine live here," said my guide, quite casually.*

Henry Miller lived in a studio at number 18. Someone opened the door and I stepped into the world of the Villa Seurat.

There were a lot of people standing about or sitting on the floor. A corkscrew staircase led up to a loggia. A gramophone was playing "Stormy Weather." Henry himself was rather bald, spectacled, already middle-aged . . . a general impression of untidiness . . . clothes rumpled, perhaps not very clean . . . an eager, concentrated look, as if he was waiting for something to happen and wanted to be ready for it. Later, I realized he was waiting for the moment when he would want to write.

When the writing moment came, it made no special difference. If there were visitors, they went on playing jazz on the gramophone, reading their poetry aloud to each other or doing whatever they happened to be doing at the time. Henry just moved over to the table in the corner and started to write. Once he began, he went on, apparently never feeling the need to take a walk or go to bed. He wrote on without fuss; pages of *Tropic of Capricorn* piled up beside him while the red wine in the bottle at his elbow sank lower and lower. After a time, someone—generally Alfred Perlès—would bring him a plate of food, to be forked messily into his mouth with one hand, while he went on typing with the other. Twenty-four hours at a stretch were nothing to him. He would go on until he had said whatever he wanted to say. Then, suddenly, it was time to stop, time to do something different, time to disappear into that still-censored world I discovered years later when, returning to Paris, I found French translations of the two *Tropics* on open sale in the bookshops.

This remarkable resistance to fatigue must have been partly due to physical stamina, somewhat fortified by drink. I think, though, that it was above all the result of an intellectual attitude which refused to admit barriers or limitations to human existence. Henry believed that people could do whatever they want to do, and that the trouble with most of them was that they did not want enough. If you wanted to write, you sat down and wrote; if you wanted to write poetry, you sat down and wrote poetry. Grammar, vocabulary and so on were just accessories. "A real poet can write poetry in any language," he said, and showed me as

* Raoul Ubac (b. 1910), painter; Chaim Soutine (1893–1943), one of the foremost Expressionist artists.

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proof a poem for his friend Hans Reichel, written in German, a language of which he had only the scantiest knowledge.

Later experience has taught me that writers in general are greatly afraid of wasting either their time or their ideas. I don't think such parsimony ever occurred to Henry. He participated energetically in whatever was going on, such as frying beefsteaks on the gas burner, cranking up the gramophone, or making sudden dashes out to the local cinema, or playing Russian billiards in the café on the Place d'Alésia. Henry liked this café because it was a working-class sort of place which gave him a rest from intellectuals. Just one year earlier the workers had gained the right to holidays with pay, and the excitement of these holidays was still fresh. There were generally groups of men—wives did not go much to cafés in those days—drinking white wine or *calva* at the counter and exchanging stories of their first glimpse of the sea or of bicycle trips along the Loire. Like me, they too were discovering new regions of experience.

Henry had a number of close friends, each of whom played a separate but essential part in his life. Quite a lot of them were younger than he was, so that one sometimes had the impression of a benevolent uncle, or perhaps one of those gurus who refuse to take themselves seriously and dispense wisdom in jokey, throw-away phrases. Some of these friends became woven for a time into my own life. Lawrence Durrell, just arrived from Corfu, had brought with him the manuscript of *The Black Book*. He was about twenty-five then—short and sturdy and radiating a kind of force which made it seem that his whole body was charged with static electricity. A great worker, constantly creating, always on the alert, absorbing everything he saw and heard, recreating it, mingling it with his own thoughts, perceptions, ideas. Although he worked so much, and drank more than was good for him, he was tremendously generous with his time, wanting to know exactly what everyone was doing, bursting with praise if he liked it and making forthright criticisms if he did not. He and Henry had been corresponding for nearly two years and were throbbing with excitement about each other's work. The meeting might have been catastrophic, but as it turned out, they seemed to complete each other in some way—Henry more of a moralist, Larry more of a poet. They exchanged abrasive criticism and delirious praise, and each seemed to heighten the tension of the other's creative life.

Alfred Perlès (Fredl)—an old crony and Henry's accomplice in literary and other adventures—was living in the Villa Seurat at the time. Small, thin and dark, as I remember him, with shiny brown eyes which

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always looked a little frightened, though what he was afraid of nobody knew, including, I think, himself. Pursued by this undefined panic, he drank, made friends in strange places, chased women, took whatever jobs would ensure him a minimal existence. His parents were prosperous Viennese Jews, so they must have heard a good deal about Freud, and surely disapproved of him. This may have accounted for Fredl's obsession with the subconscious—a region less open to the public than it is today. When I first came to the Villa Seurat, he was editing a magazine handed down to him, for some unexplained reason, by the American Country Club. Fredl had an immediate vision of an influential literary magazine. Henry and Larry had been co-opted on to the editorial board and Larry dashed to London in search of contributors, undaunted by the fame of T. S. Eliot and George Orwell. Only four numbers appeared, leaving the original subscribers sadly puzzled by this sudden change of style. The fourth and last was entitled "Air-conditioned Womb Number," and consisted of variations on the then little-known Freudian back-to-the-womb theory, with speculations as to what might be encountered along that seductive but dangerous passage. One of the articles was by Anaïs Nin. I met her only once, briefly. She was lying on a sofa, looking like a lithe, beautiful cat.

The Womb Number was soft suicide. Letters poured in with heavily underscored accusations of obscenity and demands for return of subscriptions. The editors washed their hands of the whole affair; the magazine had been fun, but had been beguiling them from serious work.

Then there was David Edgar, who had first introduced me to the Villa Seurat. He was a somewhat clandestine painter whose work was seldom if ever seen, and who spoke either not at all or in a compulsive, hypnotic torrent about his inner torments. And there was Hans Reichel, the German painter, who lived in the same house and was admired and envied by Henry and Larry because neither of them could be content to express himself only in writing. They too painted by fits and starts and were saddened because they could not produce paintings as beautiful as his. It is not Reichel himself that I remember, but the lovely abstract water-colours he brought to the studio and propped round the walls for us to admire. There was Conrad Moricand, the astrologer—a dark, creepy man who made me feel uneasy. I never dared to ask him what the stars had in store for me. And other, shadowy figures who have faded, like so much else, from my memory.

I wonder if other things have faded too? Is it possible that we were so absorbed in the excitement of just living that we did not feel the

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shadows closing in on us? Didn't we realize that our world was about to fall apart? There must surely have been doubts and premonitions, but in my presence at least no one mentioned them. I think that Henry, who was the oldest and the leader, wanted to enjoy a doomed world before it crumbled away. He wanted to write and paint and talk and explore the byways of the mind while this could still be done. There were only a few months to go before the Villa Seurat would stand empty, deserted by its inhabitants. The street lights would be put out and Paris would become a cold, quiet city that waited and waited for something to happen.

Then it did happen, and Jeanne Bucher leaned from her balcony and said, "Now God is dead."

A Belated Tribute to Larry

BY ALFRED PERLÈS

It seems like yesterday, but it's half a century ago that I first met Lawrence Durrell. He had left Corfu, his paradisiac Ionian island, for Paris to meet Henry Miller. Larry was enthralled by Henry's *Tropic of Cancer*. His enthusiasm about and praise of Miller's first-published book were beyond adjectives of admiration, and he simply had to meet its author in flesh and blood.

Henry radiated from 18 Villa Seurat. He occupied the studio apartment on the first floor of the house. On the ground floor to the right was Betty Ryan, to the left Michael Fraenkel, the "Boris" in the first *Tropic*.

By the time Larry joined us in Villa Seurat, in 1937, Henry was already a much sought-after personality. His place was always full of people, mostly drunks, neurotics, morons and would-be geniuses eager to unload their various problems on Henry's shoulders. They walked in and out of the place as in a milk bar. Milk bar? What a blasphemous metaphor! Sanatorium or spa would be more to the point. For they all expected to be cured by Henry. And Henry cured them. Simply by listening to their incoherent talk and murmuring an occasional "Hm hm." And they went off on their way—cured. Henry was a miracle worker. He put Lourdes, Lisieux and Avila in the shade.

So much for this famous landmark in Villa Seurat, so exhilaratingly alive in its heyday, now extinct, dead, unresurrectionably dead. And I can't even think of a suitable epitaph. There can't be many survivors left in the once milling crowd. Offhand I can think only of three: Larry, Betty Ryan and myself. I am the oldest of the three, practically a period piece.

Now back to Larry. We clicked instantly at our first meeting; our friendship was born at first sight and has endured ever since. I've fully

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described our meeting in my short book, *My Friend Lawrence Durrell*, and I'm not going to repeat myself. What I failed to mention in the book is that I was first struck by his melodious voice and the beautiful English he spoke. Most of the people I knew at the time were Americans, and I spoke American before I could speak English.

Nothing surprising about that. As a derelict of the defunct Austro-Hungarian monarchy, my native tongue wasn't English. But I learned the language at an early age and was soon proficient in it. I still remember the first novel I read in English without a dictionary. It was *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. And the second was *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

However, this is beside the point. While in Paris, Larry and his wife Nancy lived in an elegant house near the Parc Montsouris. As for myself, I occupied a rented room in the Impasse du Rouet, a little alleyway round the corner from the Café Zeyer at the Place d'Alésia, a few minutes' walk to Villa Seurat.

War clouds were already darkening the horizon; the Second World War was in the offing. But we never paid any attention to the developing crisis. With Larry's arrival in Villa Seurat, our gaiety had reached a new high; there was an uninterrupted succession of festive parties that went on all night and often till the early hours of the morning.

The end came quite suddenly. One morning, Larry knocked at my door in the Impasse du Rouet and said: "Get packing; we're off to London."

What could I do? I was given the imperious command to pack, so I packed. Larry and Nancy were waiting for me downstairs in a taxi. Gare du Nord. The boat train was in full steam already and in less than three hours I was in England.

My first reaction was one of dismay. Everything in the country was different from the world I had known heretofore—the people, the accents, the smells, the very atmosphere of the place. Even the grass seemed to be of a different green from French grass. The crazy idea of looking for the inscription "Made in England" at the tree roots crossed my mind.

Having lived in so many countries and feeling everywhere at home, I thought of myself as a citizen of the world, but England, which was later—and not very much later—to become my best-loved step-mother country, struck me as utterly alien. It's possible that subconsciously I blamed Larry for my disarray. I told him I felt like a spaceman and it was wicked of him to have brought me from outer space into this alien world.

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At this point, I'm catching myself in a lie. Of course, I never could have made such a remark to Larry at the time. The preoccupation with space and spaceships was still a few generations ahead in time. Even science fiction wasn't as yet concerned with space and the conquest thereof. Some British scientist had already succeeded in splitting the atom, but the atom bomb was still in the remote future. There was no talk about radioactivity, air pollution or acid rain. Nobody could envisage nuclear warfare, let alone Mr. Reagan's Star Wars.

Now, had I used such an inconceivably precocious term as spaceman in my talk with Larry, he would have burst out laughing and exclaimed, still laughing: "Of course, you're a spaceman, but you aren't the only one. Aren't we all spacemen and spacewomen and space-children in this little world of ours? Doesn't the earth move about in space, just like all other heavenly bodies in the universe, all moving about in some preconceived plan, preconceived by some unfathomable spirit some call God?"

And of course he would have been right. That the earth was moving around the sun, and not vice versa, must have been known to many earlier civilisations. That knowledge got lost in the dark ages but was rediscovered by Copernicus in the 15th century and made public by Galileo a century later.

I apologize for this digression. To put it in a few words, I told Larry that I didn't like England and that I was going back to my cosy place in the Impasse du Rouet. He neither approved nor disapproved of my decision. Perhaps he had some foresight which I was lacking.

I was fully resolved to go back to Paris. I had the return ticket already in my pocket. And then I didn't leave. Why not? One of those imponderable fortuities made me meet a girl, a lovely English girl, and I stayed on till the war broke out. I was stranded in England, but stranded for my own good.

For it is safe to assume that, had I been caught when the Germans marched into Paris I couldn't have passed the four war years in hiding. My address was known to the Service des Etrangers of the Préfecture de Police. And the French authorities had good reason to maintain good relations with the occupying forces. Not all Frenchmen were in the Resistance movement; the police certainly weren't. They would probably have turned me over to the Germans, as a gesture of good will.

And that, without a doubt, would have meant the Gestapo. And my fate would have been sealed. There no longer were any imponderable fortuities I could have hoped for. The Gestapo might not even have beaten me up, though that's unlikely. But I would certainly have been

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shipped to one of the notorious concentration camps in Dachau, Buchenwald, Belsen, or Auschwitz, and ended up in a gas chamber.

But in England I ran no risk. And it was Larry who had taken me there, albeit against my will. Thus, with or without foresight, he surely has saved my life, for what it's worth.

So thank you, Larry, many belated thanks.

Nous faisons de l'histoire!

BY BETTY RYAN

It was a great day in the Villa Seurat when Larry Durrell at last came up from Corfu. Henry Miller was there to receive him full of eagerness and of curiosity I suppose after their long and ardent exchange of letters. Anybody who knew Miller had heard about gifted young Durrell who arrived in Paris with his Nancy, his golden youthfulness, his golden speech, and his robust, winning laughter.

One Sunday in early October of 1937, an unusually warm Sunday for those years, a few of the most frequent visitors to No. 18 in the Villa Seurat gathered in my studio (ground floor, right) for a luncheon to welcome the Durrells. Present were Henry Miller, Fred Perlès, Hans Reichel, the painter and poet, Larry and Nancy Durrell, and myself. Mr. Tcheou,¹ our Chinese friend, stopped in late for coffee. The windows of the big studio were open front and back, onto the cobbled street and onto a diminutive courtyard with green; a friendly Indian summer light filled the high-ceilinged space. There was a sense of excitement in the air, a sense of the gala occasion that it was. Conversation and the good wine flowed. Nobody held back. Durrell was at ease, vocal, full of jokes and full of seriousness. Late, toward the end of the day, Henry Miller all at once rose from his chair, commanded our attention, and with a wry, conspiratorial smile said: "You know we around this table are making history! I know it may sound crazy but history it is." He wagged his head and hummed and then burst into laughter holding his glass high.

While at lunch amiable Larry Durrell with his strong voice and rich, almost unctuous words had evoked for us the immensity of the sky that is like the emblem of Greece, the blinding curtain of light at noon, the dramatic line of the Albanian mountains across from his north Corfu village. We followed him as he plunged into the shining water of the

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tiny bay before his house and miraculously caught a fish with his hands. Durrell in letters had been urging Miller to visit him on Corfu; Durrell was still trying to lure him with his Ionian landscape and tall Attic tales. Henry Miller, always attracted by stories of far away exotic places, attentively followed Larry's words with his subliminal hum of approval. Miller would nod his head now and again as though to spur Larry on to even greater transports of vision and language. Miller liked to egg people on to their utmost.

Miller's own talk, like his presence, was elastic and mercurial. He would strike out into metaphysics, often without preamble, with the same admixture of erudite words and Brooklynese slang that he used when discussing everyday matters like the agonizing problem of heat at No. 18. Often he strode about as he talked modulating his voice from low to a high, almost squeaky pitch. He and Hans Reichel had been speaking of Knut Hamsun's *Mysteries*, a great favorite with both. Miller and Reichel were never long together before some mention was made of Nagel, Hamsun's enigmatic hero. Each carried within himself an aspect of Nagel but aspects that were widely different; for no two men were more unlike than Reichel and Miller. Their bond was admiration, sometimes spiced by jealousy. An exquisite Reichel watercolor hung on the wall near our table and Miller had stepped over to examine it and was rhapsodizing over it. Suddenly he turned to Reichel and asked him if he would destroy the picture for the sake of love for a woman. Reichel anguished; Miller pressed him as though with a desire to expose Reichel's very quick, his daemon. Reichel, almost in tears, his back against the wall, said he would not destroy the painting.

Miller with his attractive style in talk could also be a good listener. He listened with his inner ear. If a man had anything to say Miller could hear it. He listened to Durrell and he listened to Reichel. Reichel had been saying that Larry Durrell was an "old soul," that is, not a neophyte in the matter of being a *Geisterndeseele* or a "gostersoul"² in Reichelian English. A high compliment from Reichel. One had to listen very carefully when Reichel spoke, for there were silent intervals between his words; he spoke in images without exposition. He gave the elements of the chain; it was up to his listener to link them together. He would let single words drop with the weight of a heavy stone, a heavy lode stone that might splinter into one hundred prophetic parts. Miller used to say that when Reichel entered a room, with his outlandish, gigantic stride, it was like explosive matter entering, for Reichel trailed in with him his baggage of the sublime, of melancholia, mysteries, chimeras.

In Fred's baggage these days was his new acquisition of an ungainly

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"little mag" with the droll, permanently attached name of *The Booster*. This was cause for fanciful flights of glory and hilarity. The inelegance and whimsicality of the enterprise caused Anaïs Nin disdainfully to dub it a childish prank. Even so, boosting *The Booster* as bottles of Médoc emptied made for lively sallies around the table. Each one boosted the next, themselves, their friends, dogs, cats, and chattel. A grand spoof. When Mr. Tcheou ceremoniously joined us, he also was prevailed upon to join the boosters. In Chinese, if he wished.

The convolutions of talk over the hours also had lingered over the *Diary of Nijinsky*, lauded the philosophy of Lao-tse, touched on Krishnamurti and Madame Blavatsky, a favorite of Miller's. Dark had fallen; the lamps had been turned on. It was then that Miller arose to make his toast to his fellow "gostersouls": "*Ce jour nous faisons de l'histoire!*"

¹ He spells the name *Chu* in his letters to Miller.

² I retain Reichel's original spelling: "gostersoul."

Personal Reminiscences of Lawrence Durrell

BY BUFFIE JOHNSON

My principal feeling about Lawrence Durrell, and I am going to speak from the feeling side, is of a personality with an enormous sense of fun, terrific energy and a kind of wildness very evident when he was young. We were the same age, and came to Paris at the same time, Larry from Greece and I from the States. He came especially to see Henry Miller. The little circle that I met him in consisted of Fred Perlès, David Edgar, Henry and Larry. I detested Henry, both the man and his writing. I didn't like his egomaniacal stance or his attitude toward women. I might say he disliked me quite as cordially. I rather liked the side of his personality that developed later after he came to America. I think he lived a more attractive bohemian style in California. He also had a kind of wildness like Larry's. Perhaps that wildness came from Larry. I don't know. But I have never understood Larry's devotion to what I considered such an inferior personality. Devoted he was, however. Apparently Henry had something Larry needed.

In thinking about Larry Durrell, I first realized that the characters in the *Quartet* are very bizarre, very far out, very baroque. Actually it's striking because of the similarities to people I've met through Larry. He seems to attract and reach out for some of the strangest people I have ever met. They're very much like characters in the *Quartet*.

These remarks were delivered at On Miracle Ground I: The First National Lawrence Durrell Conference, held at the State University of New York Maritime College, and were published in the Proceedings of the Conference as Vol. 5, Special Issue No. 1 (Fall 1981), of *Deus Loci: The Lawrence Durrell Newsletter*. They are reprinted here with the kind permission of Buffie Johnson.

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I went to dinner in his studio in Paris one evening. I was a little late and the conversation was well under way. The other guest was introduced to me as Count Potocki.* I noted his appearance first. It was most unusual. He wore a long red velvet robe with a heavy silver chain around his neck from which a cross was suspended. This was long before the sixties. No one wore waist-length hair then. His was long and chestnut colored, very beautiful hair. He was a handsome man, clean shaven and noble looking. The whole effect was very medieval. They were talking about Gregorian music when I came in, so I just listened, knowing nothing about Gregorian music except that I liked it. This being the nineteen-thirties, I was very young and naive, and as I sat there listening, I tried to figure out how this titled man could at the same time be part of the Church. His appearance stunned me. What passed through my mind was that the Catholic Church was closely knit with the aristocracy in many countries and that this man, who was Polish, must be a cross between a Monseigneur and a Prince by birth. I didn't know about these things at all. But my illusion was dissipated quite soon. They began talking about the abdication of Edward VIII, the hottest topic of the day, when Potocki said, "Well of course I was picketing Buckingham Palace when I was arrested. I was uneasy because I was afraid they would find the pornographic pictures in the bottoms of my sleeves." He indicated the excellent hiding place in the cathedral sleeves of his robe. The next conversational gambit gave me a real jolt. Potocki, it seemed, enjoyed intercourse à trois, the third party being a servant whose sole purpose was to assist in the various postures. I began to concentrate carefully on how I might avoid being escorted home by this gentleman. I think I did avoid it. I don't remember. Shortly after this—a month or so I guess—I went to London with Larry and another friend. The purpose of the journey for Larry was to ask T. S. Eliot if he would write an introduction to *The Black Book* which Larry had just completed. Eliot did not do so, but instead wrote a letter of appreciation for the book which appeared in the first edition. It was the first time I had been in London. I had been living in Paris and London seemed very strange to me. My introduction was through Larry to whom the whole English way of life was an anathema. *The Black Book* mirrors this attitude. Everything in town was pointed out disparagingly, yet it all seemed very jolly to me. To me it was great fun. The first thing we did upon arrival was to call on Count Potocki who lived in a very

* Count Potocki de Montalk was the founder of the *Right Review* and, in 1958, of the Melissa Press.

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attractive 18th century attic. As we came in, we saw a huge map of Poland spread over the floor with map pins marking boundaries. Potocki greeted us with, "Oh, this is a terrible day for me, a terrible day for me. My horoscope is impossible! I don't know what to do. I'd kill myself if it weren't for the fact that my brother and I are very occupied with the dividing of Poland between us. I should commit suicide. I should according to the stars." And so he went on about it for some time. I understood then that, being the eldest son, he was the pretender to the throne of Poland. What I didn't know was that he was, in truth, an Australian.

At that time, Larry was filled with the idea of writing a book on pretenders. He knew so many that he felt it would make a good book. That started another saga. We went to see the poet John Gawsworth, the crown prince of Redonda, a tiny island in the West Indies. As pretender to the throne, he would inherit the title of Juan I of Redonda from a writer, M. P. Shiel, whose father had bought the island, made himself king and collected taxes from the natives. The realm was very rich from its great piles of booby bird droppings that had accumulated on the island for hundreds of years. The droppings were actually mined and sold for fertilizer. What delighted Larry the most was that one could make money out of booby shit. Some time later, the British came along with a gunboat and claimed Redonda as their own, leaving Juan I without a throne. All of this was told by Gawsworth who said that as crown prince it was within his power to make us aristocrats of his lost kingdom. He was collecting a group of people whom he found entertaining to take back to Redonda when he reclaimed it. What he really enjoyed was making these friends a part of his court. I was given the wonderful title of Duchess de la Nera Castilla de Redonda, and have a parchment scroll to this effect. It seems there was some rivalry between Larry and Gawsworth for the favors of Larry's first wife, Nancy. So the tall John Gawsworth named Larry, who is not a very tall man, Don Cervantes Pequeña (the Little Duke).

Everyone I met through Larry had an aura of the fabulous about them. He collected the wild and fanciful. I have seen Larry off and on through the years, and he has always had the same preoccupation with strange and colorful people. The English love eccentrics and the reality which they construct for themselves. Americans are conformists and frown on anyone unusual. Larry had a wild sense of fun, though underneath one feels the solidity of his character. One of his friends from London whom I met after the war was Tambimuttu, the publisher of *Poetry London*. A good poet himself, Tambi was one of the most

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consistently outrageous people I've ever known, a real eccentric. Another was Alexander Calder at whose large country house outside of London we gathered one evening with artists and writers to view his Circus, now in the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Sandy had constructed little manikins who performed circus acts with his aid. That a serious artist would be so playful as to perform a whole circus with little mechanical toys was considered very avant garde at that time. Curiously enough, Sandy was one of the few eccentrics ever to have achieved success in America.

Larry was somewhat of a visual artist himself, continually making sketches as he sat in cafés. I just came across a watercolor he had given me that I'd tucked away in a book. The sketches of little towns he jotted down from memory of Greece and especially Corfu are really good. But I think his drawings (of which I have a number) are the best of all. The descriptions in Larry's work, the coloring of landscapes especially, seem to me extraordinarily sensitive. I think he is very, very "eyeminded." That is to say, we are all divided into eye or ear people, most of us leaning in one direction exclusively. I think that Larry's visual sense is certainly more vivid than that of almost any modern writer I can think of, and this is apparent also in his conversation. This visual sense extends into a sense of place. Larry had intended to lay the *Quartet* in Athens, not in Alexandria. He had lived in Athens a long time and his friends, such as Katsimbalis (Henry's model for *The Colossus of Maroussi*), whom I subsequently met through Larry, told him that he would never be able to live in Athens again if he laid his book there. Athens is so ingrown, so vitriolic if it chooses to be. He just didn't dare place it in Athens. I think Alexandria was the better choice, combining as it does the East and West to a greater extent than Athens.

When World War II broke out, Larry returned to the island of Corfu but he ended up spending the war in Egypt. I didn't hear anything from him until the war was over. We began to correspond again, and then I came back to Europe where we met in London for a few weeks. Looking back, I think all of us, when we first met, were suffering a great deal living in Paris just before the war. Hovering over us was the threat of war, the collapse of Europe, the terrors for so many people, especially our Jewish friends whom we tried to help. Paris was under the influence of the Third Column burrowing from within, and constantly sprinkling us with propaganda through secret agents. They convinced the French and the foreign populations of the enormous strength of the Nazis, who would sweep into Paris and absolutely annihilate everyone and everything. The war would be over before we

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knew it, we thought. But it didn't happen that way. I was in Corsica for the summer when war was declared. Everyone I knew hurried away on the first boat they could catch to their regiments or to the nearest seaport. I went straight to Paris because three years' production of my paintings were there. I felt that if people could live in Madrid for years under bombardment, I could certainly survive a brief sojourn risking the bombs to save my canvases. It was a good thing I did.

By the time of the war, Larry and Nancy were divorced. His marriage to her was breaking up when we had first met in Paris. During the war he married Eve, a pretty young woman, an Alexandrian I believe, and the mother of his second daughter. His first wife, Nancy, was a talented English painter. His last wife—no, not his last wife—his third wife, Claude, with whom he was really deeply in love, was a writer and had published several novels of interest. A French woman, very beautiful, nice, helpful, understanding and supportive, Claude was also very French. They were really happy together. Unfortunately, she died suddenly of cancer. Larry was absolutely inconsolable. I don't think he's ever gotten over it. It's very hard for creative people to find the right mate. If Larry is very lonely and embittered by the loss of the only person really important to him, it's understandable. He finally remarried after some years. I haven't seen him since that marriage was dissolved.

I myself have never been able to quite make out his attitude toward women, a very important question for me. I am inclined to think that perhaps I am basing my impression entirely on my early feelings about Larry. His seemed to be the Pygmalion attitude which prevailed at that time. But, by the time he married Claude, I wasn't at all sure what it was. I wasn't close enough to him anymore to know. I visited them twice on the farm at Mazet Michel for extended visits, but it was no longer possible for me to gauge his attitudes. Larry was very respectful of her writing and of her education and her mind. They were well suited. After Claude died he seemed to be just annoyed with every woman because she was not Claude. The circumstances under which I first met Larry were very revealing of his attitudes; that is, the imminence of war and the dissolution of all that we knew and cared for. Under such conditions, it is easier to tell what people are like, to really see them. Sometimes people change and, at others, circumstances change them. Some will to change, others grow and become more conscious. It's particularly difficult for me to analyze Larry as our Piscean birthdays were one day apart, and for me he represented the twin that was lost at my birth.

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There was a certain amount of excess in evidence, the most striking example of which I recall had to do with a film, rather mediocre at best, about travelers in Tibet. Henry Miller and Larry were both absolutely mad about the film, absolutely frantic, like children. I think I went with them about three times to see *Lost Horizon*, and they must have gone ten. Henry thought of himself as a mystic, which was about as far from reality as one could get. He was always writing begging letters for money for himself, and always trying to extract money from me for a magazine they had all gotten together to edit called *The Booster*. This magazine represented Larry's sense of fun, but it was a lot like Henry too, in that the magazine was gotten by a trick. There wasn't any money for the magazine which was the house organ of the American Country Club of France. The printer didn't realize that they had decided not to publish anymore; neither did the Cunard Line or the French Line nor did the various perfume manufacturers who had advertised in *The Booster*. So that's how *The Booster* was launched. And anybody could get into the magazine if they made a financial contribution. William Saroyan was their favorite author at that time, and so he was published, whether or not he sent them money. The magazine's name delighted them. It amuses me still.

Larry's wild humor is not so discernible in his books. Larry had such a great sense of fun. He was like a trickster hero, very much like Loki or Raven. I suppose that is what he liked about Henry. Henry was a real trickster hero. Larry didn't have to be, but I think he had a trick or two up his sleeve.

Recollections of Lawrence Durrell

BY ANNE RIDLER

Ci-git LGD, a poet,
His prose was verse,
He did not know it.
He never guessed
His verse was prose,
But worse than either was his Pose . . .

Thus wrote Larry, on the back of one of the first letters I had from him. I think it was in the summer of 1938 that he appeared above my horizon. I was then working in Faber & Faber, partly as secretary to T. S. Eliot and sub-editor for the monthly *Criterion*, and partly as copy-editor and manuscript-reader in general. Larry's entrance had been heralded, like that of a principal in a play, by sundry letters to Eliot from Henry Miller, for whom he was evidently the leaven that redeemed the lump of the English race. Faber's had published Larry's novel *Panic Spring* under a pseudonym, and Miller pressed *The Black Book* on Eliot, but it was obvious that this would not pass the censor, though it had already been published in Paris.

Larry and I must have met first in the firm's premises at the corner of Russell Square, but I can't summon up out of memory a first sight of him: he is part of the inscape of those London days, and our subsequent meetings, meals and talks seem to have stretched over years instead of the few months of 1938-9, and a few occasions after the war. Larry was living with his wife Nancy in a house on Camden Hill Road which had been lent them by a friend, Hugh Guiler, and I was living close to Faber's in Taviton street—the house has since been swallowed up by London University. I was married that July to Vivian Ridler, and Larry invited us to dinner in Camden Hill—red wine and risotto, excellently cooked by Nancy. Thus began our meetings, at their place or ours, or occasionally in gatherings of poets, in the uneasy climate of

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post-Munich and pre-war. We shared a taste in films and I remember a visit to see the Marx Brothers in Notting Hill, when Larry, having forgotten something, didn't enter the cinema with Nancy and ourselves: soon after the beginning Nancy said: "Larry's in—I can hear his laugh."

We certainly laughed a lot in Larry's company, and there was a good deal of gossip, but no malice. He is undoubtedly one of the most brilliant talkers I have ever encountered, and luckily the flavour of his talk, with some of his satirical character-sketches, can be tasted from his letters, which indeed seem so much an extension of his conversation that I confuse the two in memory.

We discussed our contemporaries, of course, but it was in a letter that he threw off a memorable impressionist picture of various poets:

People have their climactic flavour; Dylan Thomas is built out of suffocating coal from a Welsh mine; Barker out of a town boy's school primer—Piers Plowman say, where medieval England is green enough to make one weep for landscape; and where all the words are latin and morte d'arthur; Auden out of a hard concrete squash-court and swimming-bath, or a Silver Age tomb say; and MacNeice out of Birmingham art gallery; Spender out of the don's oak panelling, and windows looking out over the river, and books of geography for those who live in universities or asylums for the aged.

Larry's mimicry, of course, is lost in quotations. I remember with joy an imitation of Tambimuttu reading an impassioned love-poem of his own composition.

It was to be expected that Eliot, a literary father-figure to Larry as to all poets of his generation, would be viewed with varying reverence and exasperation according to mood. Eliot's integrity as an artist always had his respect. I remember his comparing the achievement of Eliot with that of Wyndham Lewis, who started as Larry thought with a far more brilliant natural endowment—"yet look how much farther Eliot has got, with a plank and two bits of string."

One of Durrell's most endearing characteristics was his anxiety that his friends should thrive, and if there was any trace of a writer's jealousy in his nature, I never saw it. When we first knew each other, I had published no poetry, and he set to work to distribute my MSS in likely places, printing some in his own Paris-based paper *Delta*. Thus, in an undated letter of that winter, he wrote:

dear anne bradby alias ridler: I thought I would send you a little message: THE POEMS IMPROVE IN REREADING: DO NOT FLINCH: THEY ARE GOOD: have sent some to Nicholas Moore: here, I send you a little thing I spawned the other

RECOLLECTIONS OF LAWRENCE DURRELL

moment or so as a greeting. [Here follows "The Green Man," and Durrell continues:] have you typescripts, copies etc; you must find cherry-weather titles to go with these; we must try USA, Laughlin and Co. have you copies? Now I really think you must sit up like an intelligent bunny on her tump and signal the outer world. REMEMBER: REJECTION ALWAYS MEANS INFERIOR TASTE ON THE PART OF THE REJECTOR. THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT. Once get the attitude and you will scatter the young nobodies like has-beens, and even the will-bees will wonder WHO and WHAT and even WHY. Necessary then: TITLES: SOME OF THE POEMS FOLD UP LIKE SHY CROCUS TOWARDS THE END: AN EAGLE EYE: AND AN ALTITUDE FINDER.

Earlier in the first letter quoted above, he had given me my own "climactic flavour":

I walked the other gusty morning from Faber to your place; and suddenly realised en route what the inner geometric structure of your verses were built around. The two beautiful little squares with their trees nodding, if a bit frosty and nubian as yet with winter; I feel that here in late spring, when the green swells up, the sap of your stuff is generated. Tell me if I am wrong. But I see Gordon Square nodding quietly behind the lines; and you walking about on softly punctuated stilts of iambic verse among the green. Perhaps it's rubbish, but it's what I feel.

In relation to his own work he was (it seemed to me) wholly without vanity, and without false modesty either, though he did once make the surprising remark that he was "not a writer." Criticism he accepted readily—even with alacrity. "Good, very good," he wrote in answer to some comments of mine:

I find you very acute and very much to the point. In fact I dance inside, because these are my very real faults, and they are perhaps my greatest virtue . . . not in poetry, but in self! The average reader opening my poem at any place [i.e. "Hamlet"] is apt to remark "Gad! A forest of carbuncles," and this I feel is very just, and in a deep sense exactly what I want. There is such a strain nowadays to grow up poetically, to cultivate a distinctive mannerism before a man himself is cultivated, that it breeds a defensive fun in me. Hence the caper sauce and huge adjectival sausages I ram into the blunderbuss before letting fly. I refuse inside to be older than I am, or more pure; and with the help of acute criticism it would be easy to gild the dewdrop, and get people to imagine it was a lily. As it is I think you are probably the best critic to think upon, because being a woman you really are on the other side of the fence.

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The fact was that he saw very clearly what he wanted to do, and he could accept that there might be failings incidental to his main purpose, or borrowings which might ultimately be eliminated, "because the total structure is what I try for first."

So "the self-liking is too deep for damage! I smile, pity, and wait for them to come round to my way of thinking!"

Larry was always able to see himself in a comic light, mocking the solemnity of lectures he was giving on contemporary poetry (in Argentina after the war), and writing of *The Black Book* that "it is my *O altitudo top note*."

On personalities, literature, anything connected with the visible world, I found Larry invariably illuminating, even when we didn't agree. On metaphysics or theories about the universe, I often felt that the rapidly spinning wheels engaged no gear. He was an enthusiastic advocate for the writings of various minor prophets, whose works I found unpalatable or tedious. When I first knew him, the prophet was Graham Howe; after the war, Mott, who interpreted the human psyche in the light of pre-natal experiences. Groddeck was another favourite savant, whom I did find rewarding. Although Larry's mind was not closed to Christian religious emotion as expressed in the seventeenth-century English poets, the designation "Christian" was rarely mentioned by him without its pendant adjective "sweaty." And he considered that the Christian doctrine of personal responsibility had been a disastrous inheritance for our dramatic writers. Writing to me after the war, apropos of his drama *Sappho*, he said:

What I am after is the Spanish Tragedy or Tamburlaine. It will have to be as coarse as that until we get our hands in and until the bastards surrender the film to us as our proper medium. But even then we have to face the psychological problem of individual responsibility; whereas to really purge and satisfy drama should not be a slice of life, or a morality done in terms of psychology, but a piece of mechanism reflecting the unearthly diversity of the real, which points, *at each and every step*, at the repose and structure of the ideal; and this done in terms of action, not by tableaux and tricks and monologues.

Our correspondence survived the hazards of wartime postage, and for a few months after the war we were able to meet again in London, sometimes in the company of Larry's friend, Theodore Stephanides. When Larry was posted overseas once more he continued to write, and some of these letters are printed in Alan Thomas's *Spirit of Place*.

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During this time he wrote his book on Rhodes (*Reflections on a Marine Venus*), and I was given the job of shortening it for publication.

In 1948 my husband was appointed Assistant Printer to the University of Oxford, and we moved to live there. Larry approved, and wrote:

I'm very glad. I want Vivian to be rich and respected. I must have a few friends who are good for a touch in later life, when I reach the obviously seedy period which lies ahead.

Thus it happened that when, in 1951, Larry and his second wife, Eve, decided that her baby should be born in an Oxford nursing home, to which end they rented a house in Headington, our meetings were renewed for a while, and we also met Larry's delightful mother. But these meetings were in fact our last, though Larry continued to write to me throughout his time in Cyprus—years which saw the break-up of his marriage to Eve, and the achievement, against all the odds, of his novel *Justine*. After that, our correspondence virtually ceased.

Why did we fail to keep our friendship in repair? Divergent paths, no doubt, and preoccupation with very different ways of life. There was also the fact that by the end of 1957 Durrell was a world-famous writer, and the calls on his time precluded the expansive letter-writing of earlier years—the letters collected in *Spirit of Place* end with the early sixties. Moreover, his creative power went into novel-writing rather than poetry, where my criticism had been helpful. However this may be, and however regrettable, I think of our friendship as suspended, rather than brought to an end.

Durrell in Egypt

BY GWYN WILLIAMS

Cairo

The Anglo-Egyptian Union, with its agreeable old building and spacious garden at Zamalek, was the social centre of the *Personal Landscape* writers. This literary quarterly, which ran for eight numbers, was edited by Robin Fedden, Bernard Spencer and Larry Durrell, and I remember sitting outside the club house, with two or three of us, and Bernard coming from the gate bearing copies of a new issue. It must have been in 1942. The British Council thought of the Anglo-Egyptian Union as a place where British and Egyptian members might meet and mix socially. But Egyptians were slow to adopt the notion, which appeared to commit them too obviously to pro-Britishness. (I protested in vain against the term Anglo.) Sharing the same entrance and garden was the Egyptian Officers Club where I'm told Naguib plotted the overthrow of Farouk.

The members of the A. E. U. whom I remember were teachers, lecturers, and professors employed by the Egyptian government or the British Council, members of the Embassy or government staffs, like the companionable Ted Fouracres of the Sudan Agency, and visiting or resident journalists and writers. We saw a lot of Reggie (R. D.) Smith but not so much of his wife Olivia Manning, who stayed at home writing the novels that were to make her famous. A friend of Larry's was the political journalist Keith Scott Watson, whose wife Nievis, a Catalonian beauty, was apt to flare her personality and outrageous English idioms into the bar or billiard room.

Alexandria

In 1943 Durrell went down to Alexandria to organise and run an Information Office for the Foreign Office. There he showed an easy ability to choose and keep an efficient, pleasant staff whom I remember

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as the excellent Miss Palli for newspaper research, the factotum Axelos, and a pretty secretary, Marjorie Philpot. His premises in the heart of the city became a refreshing port of call for me. There were cafés and bars near by. The acquaintance Larry formed there were the widest and most varied possible. There he met and fell in love with Eve Cohen, a young attractive Jewish (but stateless) journalist. Larry's divorce from Nancy had not then come through but he decided to loosen Eve from her family ties and, I suppose, an arranged marriage. Eve was to pretend a visit to Cairo on journalistic work but was to get off the train at the suburban station Sidi Gabr, only a few miles from the city centre. I was to be waiting outside the station in my car. The plan worked. Eve crossed to my car and I drove at once to my villa on the Rue Sirdar. There she hid for three days until the hue and cry for her died down and Larry brought a taxi to take her to his flat in Moharrem Bey. This was the spacious top floor flat in the Ambron family home (the Ambrons were cultured Italian Jews long resident in this once-fashionable quarter). Larry shared this flat with Paul and Billie Gotch, but all to himself he had a little tower on the flat roof, where he used to retire to write, at roof-top, tree-top and muezzin height.

In September 1942 I went to Alexandria to be head of the English Department of the newly founded Farouk I University. I plunged at once into the history of the city. Someone gave me a copy of E. M. Forster's *Alexandria* signed by the author; I read his *Pharos and Pharillon* and I read translations of the modern Cavafy and the ancient Theocritus and R. A. Furness' translations of Callimachus and of the epigrams in the *Greek Anthology*.

It seemed to me in the spirit of the city to set up a verse-war between Alexandria and Cairo and Larry took happily to it. We settled on teams of four a side: Cairo to be represented by Bernard Spencer, Terence Tiller, Bryn Davies, Robin Fedden; Alexandria by Lawrence Durrell, Harold Edwards, Robert Liddell and myself. Eighteen poems have survived from the contest and here is Durrell's attack on Cairo:

Against Cairo: An Ode

Dull by the brutish desert and the fens,
 In Cairo all you prostituted pens
 Flow slimy as the unchristian Nile
 With logodaedely or bile:
 In warts on prose, on poetry in wens.
 Speak then, thou smart unbridled Fedden
 Who doth with base iambic leaden
 Stir the dark khamseen with thy verse,

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And in full flush
 Glide with sassoon-like rush
 From poetry to pose—or something worse.

No dunciad could omit thee Spencer
 Who to the great Leviathan Story,
 Became a blubber hacker here—or flenser
 Paring like brutish dory,
 Till when you've done
 In place of skin and bone
 Is gristle left alone.

Next to the prurient one we bear—
 That No Man's Land for women, Terence,
 Whose verse by little napkins rinsed out
 By beer and puberty goes reeling,
 In clouds of local stout
 To a great bouillabaisse of girlish feeling.

Sons of the pyramid, we condemn you thus,
 Together with your doyen,
 Old Doc Davies, the literary lion,
 Of aspect barbed and something villainous.
 Now whom the fond title of the poet misuses
 In Cairo can today become
 Of interest perhaps to some—
 To us can be mere boabs of the Muses.

Larry

In preparing these poems for publication as *Flyting in Egypt* I came upon poems in MS written at the same time, in the same spirit and mostly by the same people, the whole forming a kind of fringe activity of the *Personal Landscape* writers. I decided to include some of these as *Additional Poems*. Among them was a little poem left by Larry in my villa after a visit by him and Eve. It describes their difficulty in brewing a pot of tea at my cast iron stove. We had been reading and talking about Chaucer, and this little poem, which I now treasure, is in mock-Chaucerian. It is in pencil and is signed with Larry's device of a silhouette caricature:

It was notte mere causality
 Or Freudian complex A B C
 Which us didde to light ye stove—
 Itte was not even lighte of love—
 Butte itte simplie put us on our mettle
 When we found we could not boil a kettle
 To make a homlie cup of tea—
 So to ye garden didde we hie

(And in a state of mind resembling Donne's Extasie)
 Did with feverish fingers pry
 Into ye woodpile neighbouring nigh,
 And now replete before ye blaze
 We lift our tea-warmed hearts in praise—
 May your remaining years be goode
 And neighbours never miss their wood—
 May you against a fender leaning
 In heaven atte laste brew a Heavenly pot—
 Of "Maker's" China—on a fire that's hot—
 Full conscious of the Freudian meaning.

Alexandria during the years of 1942–45 was a city of causes that were being lost, even though militarily it was successfully defended. It had never been an Egyptian city, and for the Romans it had been not Alexandria in Egypt but Alexandria ad Aegyptum. The city was being Egyptianised, not from the working class Egyptian quarter but from official Cairo. European street and quarter names were changed. The Ambron house was sequestered to make a students' hostel, and the new university was housed in a newly built nunnery on the sea front. It had been a city of Italians, Greeks, Syrians, Lebanese, European Jews and Jews of native origin, with a culture we might dub Edwardian but with its centre and resort of cultural refreshment in Paris. All this I felt was being rolled towards the sea.

Names of people I remember meeting there symbolise this mixture: Zananiri, Sachs, Baddaro, Menasce, Zogueb, Suarez, Salinas, Kerekreti, Barber, Perides, Fumaroli, Papasunessiou, Oumoff, Barukh, Baladi. Sects and philosophies flourished. There was Gaston Zananiri's dream of a new Mediterranean culture, rescued from World War II. It was out of this varied and dying ferment that Larry invented his *Alexandria Quartet*.

Larry left Alexandria in 1945 with few if any regrets, as I did a few years later. The circumstances of his departure and his delight at reaching his beloved islands are reflected in his first letter to me from Rhodes:

Dear Gwyn, We have panned out with the most extra-ordinary luck: of course with every wangle known to man also involved: the embassy, the army, the quakers and the pashas. It finally, like some spool of greasy film, unwound and there was a *laissez passer*, and we found ourselves on a filthy little Norwegian tanker in Alex harbour, with the inevitable last minute policeman trying to stop us, as in a film. I can't tell you how exciting it was to see that misty eggshell blue go down as we toolled away from Alex We were locked up for two days with

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an assortment of Norwegian cut-throat sailors, very good fun, before being shot into the lovely island of Carpathos. . . . What followed was so like one of my Mykonos dreams that even describing it spoils it. We went ashore and were led by ten little children, very clean and polite, through the warm scented morning through the bright crazy Douanier Rousseau town: no, Douanier is too harsh: Paul Klee. Rows of pastel pink blue yellow and sugar-white houses in the bowl of the harbour. The children led us deftly through a German minefield to bathe on a dazzling scorched beach where the sea was livid and nitric. Then we all went up the hill together hardly speaking, and lay under a big spreading olive in an almond orchard and here the children sat in a circle round us like druids and sang. It was beyond words clean and pure and life-giving. Then they got us water from the mountain spring, and were indignant when we wanted to tip them. And at every door in the village wonderful old wrinkled people blessed us and asked us in for a drink. E. was in tears. And so after two days terrific northwind to the softer rounder fatter Rhodes. . . . Food is scarce and poor here but we are living in a Cecil B. de Mille hotel and masses of fruit to eat: I have a bunch of yellow grapes by me as I write. . . . Bathe in green sea at six. Run on grass. Sunshine like the wand of Apollo. Only there are too many military here with their NAAFI* and coarse sports and false moustaches. Otherwise heaven.

write soon Larry

* NAAFI: Navy, Army, and Air Force Institutes.

Another Durrell

BY XAN FIELDING

Durrell the poet, we know. We also know Durrell the novelist. But what of Durrell the composer, Durrell the jazz pianist, the guitar player, Durrell the mime, the actor, Durrell the *entertainer*? Envisage his creativeness as a medieval map and you will find the known features duly plotted—the mighty river of his verse flowing unchecked from source to delta, sometimes *over-flowing* and flooding the countryside from sheer exuberance; the sierras and cordilleras of his fiction rising at intervals to a peak of Himalayan or Andean height, e.g. Mount Olive! Off shore lie the clearly defined islands of his travel writing: Corfu, Rhodes, Cyprus. But there are certain areas that are more or less uncharted—*terrae Durrellienses incognitae*. These represent the private aspect of his genius, a sort of Empty Quarter as far as his general readership is concerned, but a Land of Cockaigne to anyone holding the visa of friendship which gains admittance. I've been lucky enough to have had the privilege.

When I first met Durrell—no, that won't do; from here on it must be "Larry," for I am writing of the private person and not the public figure. When I first met Larry, then—in Athens, just before the war—I knew him only as the author of *The Black Book*; I had no idea he had also for a time earned his living as a pianist in a night-club. But as I got to know him better I found myself taking this additional gift for granted. Larry at the piano—why not? It seemed as natural as Larry at the typewriter. Those dance tunes of the thirties—with what gusto and facility he thumped them out! Then there was that unforgettable evening in Cairo, when he switched from the piano to the guitar and we went through our Greek repertoire together—modern tangos and waltzes, Cretan *mantinades*, Ionian ballads, Klephtic dirges, and above all *ta mangika*, those songs in praise of hashish and senior delinquency

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which we had picked up in the apache dives of Peiraeus and Old Phaleron. We kept it up all night, bawling more loudly the more we drank, and would no doubt have gone on even longer had I not had to catch an early-morning plane for London.

Larry often writes his own words and music. A stint as Press Attaché at the British Embassy in Belgrade yielded "Iron Curtain Blues"; and when the *événements* of May 1968 paralysed the whole of France for several weeks, he took advantage of his isolation in Sommières to map out a musical adaptation of the *Odyssey*. The title he chose for it, *Yoo-hoo Ulysses*, set the tone—above all it was to be a musical comedy—and the song he composed for the Circe episode ended with the memorable refrain:

You are bringing out the swine in me,
By giving too much wine to me.

I can still see the mischievous gleam in his eye as he tried it out on a select audience, accompanying himself on the piano. Some writers are as scintillating in person as on paper; they are as amusing to listen to as to read. Larry is also *visually* entertaining when he talks, because he is a natural and spontaneous mimic. With his ear still attuned to the accents he heard as a child in Darjeeling, he can "take off" a Babu railway clerk to perfection, imitating not only his tone of voice and syntax—"My God, man, I am trying to help you, but you are not having a chitty"—but also his facial expression, locking his jaw into the rictus that seems to afflict many Hindus when they switch from their native tongue to English.

I have also seen Larry turn himself into a Negro heavyweight before my very eyes—it must have been many years ago, because Cassius Clay had not yet become Mohammed Ali. As he spoke about the great pugilist, he seemed to add more than a cubit to his stature—not by thought but by some miraculous assumption of the character under discussion. There he was, bouncing on the balls of his feet, delivering a straight left here, a right hook there, and an uppercut which figuratively knocked me flat. I could have sworn he had even changed the colour of his skin.

May the curtain never fall on his performances.

Observations on a Marine Vulcan

BY PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR

About forty years ago I heard Larry Durrell describing someone as "a man who pumped the oxygen back into the air." It is exactly what he does himself. When all seems to languish and droop, his arrival acts like a stiff dose of Eno's or Kruschen Salts and everyone is suddenly ready to clear five-bar gates. I think this quickening touch is quite unconscious, a catching mixture of mental and physical vigour backed by a number of random attributes: "wit, intelligence, charm, comic sense, a vast array of interests and a staunchless fluency . . . unrelenting toil all day, punishing nights, hangovers that slink off next day like beaten dogs; add to this a faultless eye and ear, skill in drawing and painting, a deft touch on stringed instruments from the piano downwards, a delightful pitch of voice for talk and songs, and the speed of a dolphin in the sea. . . ." These ancient notes (though time may have reduced pace and milage in the water) still hold good. There was no need to touch on his extraordinary gifts as a writer.

Friends have always meant much to him. They are the cast of a private mythology, each with his immutable sum of characteristics; several, subtly changing on the way, wander in and out of his books in various disguises. He is very perceptive; but every now and then, when confronted by someone unknown to him, he can be led astray by misinterpretation of the data, or a passing mood; but, compared to his kindness, this light peppering with blind spots is only just worth mentioning.

Some writers, without knowing it perhaps, set obstacles in front of beginners until all seems hopeless; promise recoils and debilitating phantoms mop and mow. Larry is the opposite of these. The magic touch I have mentioned has the knack of making all seem possible; a blessed gift which, years ago, helped me—and surely many others—to

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break through external and home-made barriers to setting pen to paper.

We first met in 1942 in Cairo, under a tree in Amy and Walter Smart's garden in Zamalek, and talked far into the night. He was at the heart of the group of gifted poets and writers—Robin Fedden, Bernard Spencer, Terence Tiller, Charles Johnston and several others—who were working, between Cairo and Alexandria, at the Embassy or in the various Press sections, the British Council and Cairo University. (They were the joint producers, contributors and editors of *Personal Landscape*, the remarkable literary periodical whose few dozen issues are now collectors' pieces). A couple of months after this first encounter I met another old friend of Larry's when I joined Xan Fielding in German-occupied Crete; there, in caves and goat-folds, Xan told me about *The Black Book*, and followed it up with a score of anecdotes about their pre-war life in Athens. When the war was over, I read *Prospero's Cell* in its actual literary setting of Corfu, during that first miraculous summer, and soon Xan and I and the Corn Goddess (as Larry called her; we eventually married) went to see Larry on Rhodes. We found him settled into the Villa Cleobolus among old Turkish tombstones and elaborate black-and-white pebble-mosaics dappled with the shadows of leaves. It was an amazing sojourn, spent in talk and music and feasting, and one afternoon, in the ruins of ancient Camirus, wine-sprung curiosity set the four of us crawling on hands and knees through the bat-infested warren of underground water-conduits. We climbed out covered in droppings and dust and cobwebs, and our exploration reached an extraordinary climax when Xan leaped a couple of yards from the coping of a high ruined wall on to the top of an Ionic column twelve feet high which rocked frighteningly on its stylobate for several seconds. At last, as we watched with held breath, it became static with its new arrival poised on the capitol—for some reason, but most appropriately, with nothing on—like a flying stylipe.

Reflections on a Marine Venus, which captures these Rhodian months, was an admirable successor to *Prospero's Cell*. Each island gave birth to a book and a new sheaf of poems, and they made one look at Greece with a different glance and the same excitement and zest as the Tyrrhene coast and Calabria prompted in the pages of Norman Douglas. We visited him later in Cyprus and the midnight echoes of the vaults of Bellapaix Abbey resound in the memory still.

In Athens we shared many of the same friends—George Katsimbalis chiefly, and George Seferis and Niko Hadjikyriakou-Ghika; indeed, most of the cast of *The Colossus of Maroussi*—but, by the time we

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too became inhabitants of Greece, he had taken wing for Provence. He lived briefly in Sommières and then settled on the edge of the *garrigue* above Nîmes in a house which he seemed to be building, very capably, with his own hands. Like a marine vulcan, he hammered out the successors to *Justine*; you could almost see the sparks flying as *Balthazar*, *Mountolive*, and *Clea* were thrown sizzling from the forge. It was as though a marvellous new Alexandria were being fitted over the old and then peopled by his amazing denizens.

His next house lay a dozen miles to the west on the banks of the Vidourle, and here, under the scaling plane trees with the clank of *boules* seldom out of earshot, the task continues; after a couple of decades, he seems to have taken root at last. It is a good place to halt on the way to Greece and to draw corks in and catch up. If only it were closer to the Peloponnese, where these lines are being written! These joyful reunions don't happen often enough. Still, it is heartening to think that there Larry is, at his desk, with vigour and imagination undimmed, surrounded with glory and, I hope, with a carafe of wine cooling close by.

Lawrence Durrell in Alexandria and Sommières

BY DIANA MENUHIN

There it sat, huge and pachydermous, on a slight rise opposite the Roman-Provençal town of Sommières, so totally alien as to suppose that it might be the fossilized remains of one of Hannibal's elephants strayed from the army and slain by the Mistral, except that on closer inspection it proved to be a mid-nineteenth century villa, pure Flaubert, quite urban, cloaked in a tangle of those sinister and secretive shrubs: laurels, juniper, every conceivable evergreen overhung with stunted fir and fuzzy pine, the lot inextricably intertwined forming a giant wig to protect it from the prying eyes of that most prurient of periods.

Larry Durrell's house, built by some successful notary perhaps, who, longing for the sun, yet needed his northern shell with its mansard, its stained glass verandah and plenty of shutters to keep it in its place? A marvellous evocation of a character and a taste so sure of itself that it found nothing absurd, nothing bizarre, in dumping here among the vineyards and the dusty cornfields a solitary soul uprooted from some Rue Jean Jaurez or Avenue Gambetta without a tram passing to rattle its windows nor even a Vespasienne to adorn a nearby corner.

Larry had driven me to look at it, solitary and neglected, at a time when he and his lovely Claude were living in a small *mas* some miles away in the maquis and when they needed a bigger place to house his books and records and piano and the gaggle of children related and unrelated, culled from various marriages, that would descend upon them at all times. "Larry," I said, "it's unique and full of buttoned boots—you should called it 'Villa Bovary' or 'Villa Emma'—."

DURRELL IN ALEXANDRIA AND SOMMIÈRES

And here we were, years later, Yehudi and I, actually finding two whole days and nights to spend there (to find time to visit friends in Yehudi's palimpsest of a schedule is tantamount to asking the Good Lord to hold back the Red Sea for forty-eight hours). The sun was shining into the verandah, its red and green and yellow glass making painted clowns of our faces.

Gerry, Larry's zoological brother, was there, with his jollity and his resemblance to one of those gigantic Italian strawberries, and his pretty, pale, black-haired wife Lee. And there was a Dutch woman made entirely of bent wire who tottered about the kitchen on stiletto heels and cooked us a wonderful lunch to soak up the flow of white wine. I vaguely remember Larry's telling us he had saved her from a Fate Worse Than Death on a bus from Sommières and now she came on a bicycle (which must have looked like an extension of her own bony body)—but it might have been the other way round.

Anyway, there was dear Larry with his leonine head, now silver, and his nose like a big toe, only slightly thicker than of old, and his ringing laugh and the love of the absurd which he and I shared ever since that day when he'd first come to rescue me from boredom and sore toes, dancing the part of Frou-Frou in *The Merry Widow* in Alexandria as my War Effort. 1944, that was. He was British Information Officer, I think, and lived in the tower of a large house belonging to a nice couple of which the wife was about ten months gone and desperate to the point of explosion "Bring her to the show, Larry darling," I said, "and I'll kick it out of her." Well, he did and she barely got to the hospital in time after the curtain came down.

Larry played honky-tonk in the big cool room and Yehudi was fitting in beautifully although it wasn't at all his scene in terms of fact, but totally what he yearned for in terms of warmth and brightness of ideas and quickness of wit with the promise of interminable supplies forthcoming.

We dined in Sommières (as Larry had despatched the skeletal Hollander on her rickety bicycle safely before dark and its attendant dangers might befall her) and went up to our bedroom, pregnant with an elephantine mahogany suite, climbed into a bed fit for a ménage à quatre and fell asleep lost to the world under the clouds of an immense duvet.

We awoke to the sun streaking through the shutters and the sight of our host tip-toeing like a thief into the room balancing a huge tray, bearing a coffee-pot and a pile of hot croissants, a slab of butter and a saucer-full of that French jam so bumpy that you can see immediately it

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is made of real fruit and not the statutory mucus and glucose of one's hotel experiences.

So, in that morning twilight with our beakers full of the warm south and coffee and the bed sprinkled manna-like with crumbs, I regaled Yehudi with tales of my Alexandrian Larry, fetching me for the evening performance in an open horse-drawn gharry and of the twin obstacles of an importunate naval officer vowing eternal love with a box of chocolates at the kerbside together with a horse that wouldn't budge. Choked with irritation and embarrassment, I grabbed the box with grudging thanks, opened the lid and began to pelt the maddening animal's flanks with the hardest chocolates I could find. With tremendous result: up went its tail, out fell its dinner and off it went with a clatter and a snort and a most unmelodious smell. I continued my barrage for fear it might at any moment halt, Larry collapsed in tears of laughter, and the horse's buttocks by the time we arrived at the theatre were a perfect landscape of plastered violet creams, strawberry fancies and melting truffles.

Also of that luminous morning when we drove out in the early cool past Pompey's pillar to the great flat sandy plane with Lake Mareotis lying cyclamen-coloured in the centre and got out to amble towards it. "One drop of rain, this winter, and in the Spring the whole place will be covered with asphodel," said Larry.

After the claustrophobia of the London Blitz, and the black-out, it seemed to rinse one's eyes and I said to Larry, "I've never seen so much room in a sky before." "I'll write you a poem for that," he said. He kept his word. The beautiful nostalgic "Lake Mareotis: For Diana Gould" remains in my heart and mind as one of the loveliest presents I have ever had.

MAREOTIS

For Diana Gould

Now everywhere Spring opens
Like an eyelid still unfocused,
Unsharpened in expression yet or depth,
But smiling and entire, stirring from sleep.

Birds begin, swindlers of the morning.
Flowers and the wild ways begin;
And the body's navigation in its love
Through wings, messages, telegrams
Loose and unbodied roam the world.

Only we are held here on the
Rationed love—a landscape like an eye,

DURRELL IN ALEXANDRIA AND SOMMIÈRES

Where the wind gnashes by Mareotis,
Stiffens the reeds and glistening salt,
And in the ancient roads the wind,
Not subtle, not confiding, touches once again
The melancholy elbow cheek and paper.

Lawrence Durrell

With Lawrence Durrell on Rhodes, 1945-47

BY RAYMOND MILLS

At the end of the war in Europe, I arrived in Rhodes from Casas, an island east of Crete, where I had been the medical officer in charge of 3000 Greek and Italian refugees and some British troops. The refugees originated from the Italian territory of the Dodecanese and had escaped from the German occupation of the three islands of Rhodes, Cos and Leros. With the repatriation of the refugees to their home islands at the end of May, 1945, I was posted to Rhodes to be the Senior M.O. in charge of the Thermi Hospital, an ex-hotel equipped by the British Military Administration as a general hospital of 250 beds.

Shortly after my arrival Lawrence Durrell and his future wife, Eve Cohen, arrived and Larry took up the post of Information Officer in the British Military Administration of the Dodecanese. I knew his poetry and had once briefly met Nancy Durrell in 1943 when she visited a Greek refugee camp at Nuseirat, near Gaza, Palestine. Larry settled into the Villa Cleobolus, a kiosk-like house in the Turkish cemetery, which he described so well in *Reflections on a Marine Venus*. Soon after his arrival he brought Eve to the hospital for a consultation and I examined her and brought in one of my specialist Greek colleagues, Dr. Nikolas Tiliakos. At our first encounter we felt we had mutual sympathies and interests; shortly after we were inviting each other to our respective houses and going on picnics together, as well as meeting at official receptions.

I lived with my Greek wife, Georgina, in Alexandrou Diakou Street in a traditional Greek house. Georgina was born in Alexandria, like Eve, but both her parents were from the island of Imbros, mentioned by Homer in the *Iliad*. I had a two-seater Fiat Balilla sports car and Larry

WITH DURRELL ON RHODES, 1945-47

had the German equivalent of a jeep and we would go together exploring this really beautiful island. Rhodes had been bombarded and part of the wall constructed by the Knights Hospitallers of St. John, giving onto the commercial harbour, had been damaged, and there were scars on the walls of the municipal theatre, the town hall and the administration building, but most of the island was relatively untouched. There was quite a lot of barbed wire around, and mines were constantly being detected on the beaches and on land and sometimes sea mines drifted in. The army, assisted by P.O.W. squads, was rapidly clearing these hazards, and there were some casualties among those doing the job. Peasants going to their fields were at risk, and I was taken to see a shepherd who had been killed as he stepped off a stile onto what he imagined was the innocent hillside. Setting out in our cars, we would go picnicking at the ancient sites of Cameiros and Lindos and bathe at numerous deserted beaches. We would picnic off cheese, bread and olives with Rhodian or Cyprus wine together with "delicacies" from British army rations. The Italian road network was excellent and gave access to most of the island.

Because of the war the ancient sites were not supervised at all, and one could wander at will over land where pottery was often sticking out of the earth. We did a lot of swimming in the marvellous Aegean. Larry was an excellent swimmer and he loved it. Only in December through February was it too cold to bathe. At that time of the year it was cold, cold enough for Harris tweed jackets and duffle coats. The sea would be agitated with the north wind but the clouds would be scudding and the winter sunshine made walking very pleasant. The four of us—the two girls from Alexandria, Larry and I—would walk on the marine drive along Trianda Bay and look over to Turkey, only eighteen miles away, and see the snow on the Taurus Mountains across the strait.

Larry and I have always had interests and ideas in common and lots to talk about. He has a great interest in all things medical, and I have an abiding interest in literature. Larry likes to talk about curiosities and anomalies, and I have sent him articles from the medical journals over the years, including one on Koro (*shook yong* is the Chinese name) which he used in *Nunquam*. We don't seem to dry up, and being with Larry and having a good talk has been one of the great pleasures of my life. The four of us would have evenings when we would sing Greek folk songs and recite poetry. Larry declaimed his own poems and those of other poets. He would also recite Greek poets, especially Cavafy, both in Greek and in translation. Larry was editor, chief writer and organizer of a daily paper called *Texhni* (Art) which was published in Greek, English

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and Turkish. Larry presided over this publication and a mixed bag of Greek, Italian and Turkish operatives. I once contributed an article on the hospital.

During my work at the hospital I often came across patients who had been treated by peasant remedies, and so I started to make notes on these procedures and to get information from the ladies who were hospital cleaners, from priests, and from some of the "practical women" themselves who performed the treatments. I subsequently wrote up this material and it was published in the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* at Johns Hopkins University. Larry subsequently included extracts in *Marine Venus*.

At the end of 1946 the entry of Jews into Palestine, most of it illegally, was in full swing. Rhodes had an old established colony of Jews, and some of my patients told me that an immigrant ship had been wrecked on a nearby island in the group. They had received the news from the ship's radio, as the illegal immigrant ships' activities were obviously being monitored in Rhodes by the Jewish community. This was in the morning and I immediately requested a meeting with the Governor of the Dodecanese, Major-General Gormley, to give him the information I had received. The information was confirmed from a Police caïque which had seen lights on the tiny island of Sirina, an hour-glass shaped island lying off the south coast of Astypalaea, one hundred sea miles west of Rhodes. The island had normally no inhabitants, with only an occasional shepherd with a few sheep and goats in summer.

The governor decided to send an expedition to the island and the Royal Greek Navy Destroyer *Kriti* was to put to sea with all speed. Larry was designated to go and he brought Eve with him. I was accompanied by a Greek Red Cross nurse; a Captain of Police and a naval picket made up the party. Full speed on a destroyer was exhilarating and we arrived off Sirina as dusk was falling, entering the almost landlocked bay. It was dark when I landed with the Greek naval picket and we climbed up the rocky neck of the island and in twenty minutes we came across a handful of people led by a jack-booted Austrian who would only say the word "Yiddish." The Greek lieutenant spoke German and he explained that we had come to collect the sick and injured. We moved on and, cresting a ridge, looked down on a natural arena and saw what turned out to be eight hundred people lying on the ground in the moonlight. We moved among this crowd and saw canisters on the ground which had been dropped by parachute from aircraft coming from Palestine. There were five doctors in the party and they had ten

WITH DURRELL ON RHODES, 1945-47

casualties originating from the shipwreck. Most of the casualties had fractures and they had already been put in plaster. We decided to evacuate the casualties immediately, together with their close relatives, and the injured were taken on stretchers and manhandled over the slippery rocks into the ship's boats and put aboard the *Kriti*.

The operation went on through the night and was completed at dawn. At this time the flagship of the Palestine Patrol, HMS *Javelin*, together with two minesweepers, sailed into the bay. On the *Kriti* we received orders that all refugees were to board the British vessels and would be taken to Cyprus. I boarded the *Javelin* and, after signals had been exchanged with the admiral of the Mediterranean Fleet, was given permission to take the sick and injured plus their families to Rhodes for treatment in the hospital.

As the weather was deteriorating it was important to load the refugees on the ships as soon as possible since the shore was extremely rocky and it was very difficult to get the ship's boats alongside. Larry and Eve were on shore all morning, listening to the radio link between the ships and the shore and talking to the refugees. It appeared that they mostly originated from Roumania and the Balkans. They had proceeded by train with blinds drawn and with the connivance of the Russians to Split in Yugoslavia. Each had paid at least £30 in gold for the journey. At Split they boarded a Greek ship and she had been island hopping, laying up in secluded coves by day and sailing by night. Sirina was one of these safe havens, but the ship had gone aground and had sunk with eight dead. These had been buried when we arrived and the location was kept secret. The ship's radio had been destroyed after communication had been established with Palestine and the messages picked up in Rhodes by the Jews of the town.

When the *Kriti* was given clearance we sailed for Rhodes, leaving *Javelin* and her escort to complete the evacuation. In the event this took two days because of the bad weather.

A few months later, Larry and his team had their hands full with a visit by King Farouk of Egypt and his beautiful sister, the Empress Fawsia of Iran. They had arrived in the King's yacht, *Bahr el Nil*, with two companions. The King wanted to be free and spent a day stripped to the waist, mounting an Italian naval gun on his vessel. He drove around the island on a motorcycle and objected strongly to being shadowed by the Military Police—actually for his own security.

The two years on Rhodes was a very happy time. The island was recovering from the trauma of occupation, and war and tourism did not

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exist. One of Larry's remarks has stayed with me: "How lucky we were to know Greece as young men!"

My first sight of Greece had been Pegadia Bay in Carpathos on my arrival by the ship *Koritza* from Alexandria. The villages high up on the slopes of the bay looked like snow, and as a boat rowed out to us it appeared to be suspended in air because the clarity of the water was such that the boat's hull and the oars were totally visible and there was no discontinuity between air and water.

Our Grecian period ended in September, 1947, when the Dodecanese, previously Italian territory, were transferred to Greek sovereignty. Immediately after the impressive ceremony the Greek police took over the traffic and, having driven to the ceremony on the left hand side of the road, after midday I drove back to the hospital on the right hand side. The party was over. Life changed overnight and we knew we had to go quickly. Larry and Eve to Britain, Georgina and I to Eritrea in East Africa. It had been a wonderful time. Kazantzakis said that he never expected to go to Paradise but the nearest he ever got to it was to sail the Aegean in the spring. We were privileged to do that.

Larry, My Friend

BY MARY MOLLO

Quiet room, four candles, red wine in pottery:
Our conversation burning like a fuse,
In this cone of light like some emulsion.¹

The first time I heard his name it was before the outbreak of war in 1939. Julian Symons—now a well-known English thriller writer—who had been indulgent enough to read some of my (very bad) poetry, met me one evening brandishing a book clandestinely imported from Paris. "You must read this, Mary; it's the work of a great writer," he said as he handed me a copy of *The Black Book* by Lawrence Durrell. I rolled the name "Lawrence Durrell" over my tongue; its resonance had a special quality. Some names carry their own magic: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Pablo Picasso, names that ring like chimes. Lawrence Durrell.

I read *The Black Book* too quickly. I was eighteen at the time and not very critical, but the impression it left was unlike anything else I had read except perhaps Joyce's *Ulysses*. A world of reality in unreality, a language newly-minted to envelop characters of a new mythology; something rare and strange indeed.

From 1943 to 1946, I worked as a photographer for the British Forces magazine *Parade* that was published in Cairo for the armies stationed in the Middle East. Occasionally, the name of Lawrence Durrell would crop up. He was press officer in Alexandria, and members of our staff or people who blew in and out of our offices such as David Dunhill, George S. Fraser, John Waller had met him and gave glowing accounts of his exceptional personality, but for me he was just a name linked to *The Black Book*.

¹This memoir first appeared in *Deus Loci: The Lawrence Durrell Newsletter*, 7, No. 2 (December 1983). It is reprinted here with the kind permission of Mary Mollo.

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In April, 1946, *Parade* sent me with a reporter to do an extensive covering of the Dodecanese islands. The twelve Sporades islands had been occupied by the Turks for centuries and since 1912 by the Italians, though their population had remained essentially Greek; they were to be handed over to the Greeks by the allies. My magazine wanted coverage of the "Enosis" or "union with the motherland" celebrations. My editor told me that Lawrence Durrell was the British Public Information Officer in Rhodes and that he would organise our trip.

I was terribly excited at the prospect of landing on Hellenic soil. The hazards of war had sent me to all sorts of places, but Greece was the country that attracted me most. I was also deeply intimidated at the idea of meeting Lawrence Durrell. How was the distinguished author going to accept a slip of a girl rushing around with her Rolleiflex?

The encounter took place in the lounge of the Albergo della Rosa, where Larry was living with his girl friend, Eve, and where he had booked rooms for Stanley Maxton, the reporter, and myself. It is as vivid today as it was thirty-six years ago. I think we were both prepared for the worst: I had braced myself to meet a supercilious gentleman who would sear me with his superior intellect; he was defensively expecting a hatchet-faced woman photographer of the species that operated in the Middle East—when and where they existed at all.

We faced each other—the suntanned little blond man, the dark slim shy girl—a long look. I felt I was drowning in the blueness of the bluest of eyes. They sparkled, those eyes, like sunshine on the Aegean; they were deep, they were humourous, they held laughter and tears, they were piercing, friendly and altogether compelling. "The blueness of the old man" he might have written later.² The "old man" was thirty-four but seemed a lot younger.

Mine must have been a particularly searching look too, as Larry subsequently described my eyes as those of "someone raking the bottom of a bird's cage." When I told him I had actually read *The Black Book*, a friendship was sealed; only a handful of people had heard of it in 1946.

He had organized everything for the sea journey that was to take us from Rhodes to Patmos, stopping at all twelve islands in turn. It was hardly a luxury cruise: a Greek fisherman's old caïque devoid of any modern amenities and manned by a grinning crew of three with whom Larry and Eve conversed freely while Maxton and I were reduced to hand language.

The first night aboard proved unbearable in what was supposed to be a cabin; it meant imminent asphyxia from petrol fumes mingled with odours of oily Greek cuisine, so we slept all four side by side on the

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hatch covered with an old blanket and tarpaulin, rocked by the indigo Aegean, our faces exposed to the stars and the spray when the sea was rough.

Larry has always been a sea creature—his sign of Pisces, perhaps? He was completely in his element on our primitive vessel, exchanging jokes with the crew, commenting on each island in turn, keeping us in stitches of Rabelaisian laughter when it came to asking for the old tin which served in lieu of a toilet and with which the ladies retired as gracefully as possible to the bowels of the ship. The *tanake*, as the sailors called it, became quite an important piece of equipment during that trip.

The dark, beautiful Eve "Gypsy" Cohen was a good-humoured, warm companion presiding over our destinies like some Oriental goddess. Looking back on the whole expedition, I think we were all in a state of grace such as occurs rarely in a lifetime.

As I absorbed each island with the eye of the photographer and Maxton with the pen of the reporter, Larry was transmuting the white-washed houses, the lacework coastlines to poetry, to magic:

Bòats lying idle in the sky, a town
Thrown on a screen of watered silk.³

As always, Durrell the poet, with his art of turning words into stained-glass images, touched me most.

The island of Cos was one of the highlights of our trip. Larry wanted to spend a night in the ruins of the Aesculapium to meditate over the spirit of the place. I took a photograph of him looking like a benevolent faun, perched over a broken pillar (phallic according to him!). In his *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, Larry describes Cos as "the spoiled child of the group. You know it at once, without even going ashore. It is green, luxuriant and a little dishevelled. An island that does not bother to comb its hair."⁴

He took us to see Hippocrates' tree, and I can't remember whether it was in Cos or Kalymnos that we stopped to bathe in a place called Cefalû where the water was so icy and the wind so violent that Larry remarked it was no wonder that the inhabitants were unusually taciturn, for how could any conversation be exchanged with such a wild wind blowing into their mouths?

The climax of the tour was Patmos, not only because of the exceptional beauty of the island with the church of Saint John of the Apocalypse built around a rock with a cleft in it where the saint is said to have placed his hand, with the dazzling white-washed monastery with its

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crenellated terrace right at the summit of the island, but also because the monks offered us hospitality for the night. Compared to the caïque accommodation, it was like a luxury hotel, with a real toilet-seat, flush and all—over which Larry waxed lyrical.

In 1946, a tourist was as rare as a diplodocus in Patmos, and the monks were delighted to have visitors. They showed us the monastery's rare manuscripts, and they wine and dined us by candlelight. It was a festive occasion with Greek flags fluttering from the roof and the word "enosis" proclaimed everywhere. For centuries, Patmos had waited to be reunited to the motherland.

It was during this April in 1946 that Larry tossed a manuscript at me, saying, "You can keep that; I'm through with it." It was *Cefalû*, later to be published under the title of *The Dark Labyrinth*. I was hardly conscious of the value of such a casually bestowed gift; Larry obviously considered it something to be chucked away. Many years later, Alan Thomas sold it to an American university for me. Larry himself had suggested the sale as he thought it might fetch enough for me to buy a house in Provence that I was yearning for. Unfortunately, it didn't, and I still regret having parted with the treasure.

We had many long conversations about life, death, love—all the eternal themes of eternal conversations, but spotlighted by Larry's luminous intelligence nothing was trivial or gave one the impression of *déjà vu*. Already he was mulling over *The Alexandria Quartet*, which he referred to as "The Book of the Dead." He completed only an outline at that time of what was eventually to become the most astonishing English postwar novel. He also introduced me to the work of Georg Groddeck, whom he was determined to save from oblivion. It has taken over thirty years for Groddeck to be recognized as the father of psychosomatic medicine, and even today his importance is not fully acknowledged. Larry had a copy of *The Book of the It* which he made me read, hoping it might help cure my chronic colds. The colds didn't vanish overnight, but Groddeck has certainly been a major influence in my life; he has helped me bring up my children, fight serious illness, and learn to accept my own weaknesses. Anyone writing about Lawrence Durrell cannot afford to ignore the importance Groddeck the healer and philosopher has had in his life.

I returned to Rhodes a month later to finish the reportage. A scene remains arrested in my memory: Larry and me running across the wide beach of the Albergo della Rosa, arms extended in welcome—the welcome of a friendship that was to last a lifetime.

He and Eve had moved to the miniature Villa Cleobolus.

surrounded by its gardens of pines and oleanders and adjacent to a little Turkish graveyard. "Here in the evenings we gather for drinks and gossip, sitting in cane chairs around the little painted table. . . ."⁵ Larry and Eve were happy in this paradisiac setting, and here he wrote *Reflections on a Marine Venus*.

In June, 1946, my husband was posted from Cairo to Athens, where we were to live for two blissful years. I have never loved another country as much as I loved Greece. Everything Larry had said about it was true. The Durrells came to visit us a couple of times; with them I met Katsimbalis-the-Colossus, Theodore Stephanides, Paddy Leigh Fermor and Patrick Reilly, the British Ambassador. We had one memorable evening in a taverna in the Plaka at which several of these personalities were present and also the Honourable Stephen Runciman, the historian, who represented the British Council in Athens. In the middle of a rather drunken conversation, Runciman, looking deadly serious, suddenly broke into a high-pitched warble of "Oh! the Fairy Queen." After a few seconds of dumfounded surprise, hilarity broke out; I can still see the tears of laughter streaming down Larry's face. I don't know to this day whether Runciman intended his little ditty to be a musical divertissement or a piece of tongue-in-cheek British humour.

The aftermath of the war meant upheavals for everybody; Larry was sent by the British Council to Argentina; my husband's posting in Athens was ended, and we had the choice between Cyprus—"Cinderella Island," as one of our *Parade* reporters had named it so aptly—and Kenya. Unfortunately, we chose Kenya. Demobilisation followed; the Army had no further use for officers who were not regulars, and we set out on a crazy venture to Canada which ended in financial disaster. By 1950, we were back in England, jobless, penniless, prospects nil! By then, Larry had been posted as Press Attaché to the British Embassy in Belgrade. Any leftwing tendencies he may have vaguely entertained were dispelled for good and all in Yugoslavia. At the end of that year, Eve was pregnant; a few months later, so was I. In view of our financial situation, nothing could have been worse-timed. Can I ever forget that one of the rare people who lent us money was Larry? In spite of a steady job, he was far from prosperous: although his prestige as an author and poet was growing, none of his books was a commercial success. He lent us a hundred pounds without hesitation, and never requested it back. We repaid him gradually over years, and I am sure that if we hadn't, he would never have asked for it. Larry's generosity, like everything else about him, was not measured out. Yet I had always known him worried about money—not for himself, but for his daughter

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by his first marriage, Penny, for Eve, for the future in general. Unlike many artists, he has a strong sense of responsibility towards those who depend on him.

The Durrells decided that their child would be born in England. They were also certain it would be a son; in fact, Eve, whose exaltation at the prospect of motherhood was quasi-mystical, expected a sort of messiah! They rented a small house in Oxford near Nuffield Hospital where I went to spend a few days to keep Eve company until Larry arrived from Belgrade. I found her in a state of serene beatitude, convinced that having a baby was the easiest thing in the world. Some weeks earlier, she had come to lunch at our apartment in London with Larry's mother, a rotund and enchanting little lady who remarked in her gentle voice that she had had four children and giving birth was a bit painful; however, she was sure her daughter-in-law would manage splendidly.

The child was born on the 6th May 1951. It was a GIRL, dark as an olive and with lots of hair. Eve gave a hair-raising account of the agonies she had endured: "Such terrible pains, Mary, you can't imagine." I could imagine only too well, as I was due for the same ordeal in September and scared stiff. Now, the immediate problem was to find the child a name. Larry and Eve had lined up an impressive selection for a boy but were at a loss for a girl. We spent an evening trying out a variety of improbable appellations. Finally, as a joke, I suggested Sappho—I had just finished reading Larry's play of that title. To my alarm, the Durrells seized upon it with common delight. I implored them not to take me seriously; it was such a difficult name for a child to carry. "Nonsense," said Larry, "it's perfect; it's a beautiful name." I begged them to give her a second name which she could fall back on if she found Sappho unbearable or unwearable. "What about Jane?" I suggested. "Fine," said Larry, "Jane is a nice, plain name." So I became Sappho Jane's godmother, mentally according the child every right to strangle me one day. In a letter from Henry Miller to Larry dated 10/22/51, Miller wrote, "I'm delighted the girl is called Sappho, and not named after some new British man-of-war!" Sappho, who grew into a dark, statuesque beauty, always seemed happy about her name.

Far less happy was Eve's nervous breakdown when they returned to Belgrade and the subsequent breakup of their marriage. Eve returned to England, and Larry moved to Cyprus with his infant daughter. He bought and restored a house near the Bellapaix Abbey where he hoped to spend a few years writing in peace. He had landed on one of the most

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explosive situations in the Mediterranean. If I remember rightly, he first took on the task of teaching English to Cypriot children, but with his fluent knowledge of Greek he was soon drafted for the job of Press Attaché. Alas, I have not kept his letters of the Cyprus years, but what productive years they were! In that storm-tossed island, he wrote *Justine* and enough poetry for the *Tree of Idleness* volume. *Bitter Lemons*, a Durrellian account of the three years he spent there, was his first real commercial success: it won the Duff Cooper Award, became a Book Society choice, and hit the headlines.

It was during Larry's Cyprus years that he first wrote to me about a wonderful girl who was coming to visit him; her name was Claude Vincendon. Three years were as much of Cyprus as Larry could bear, and the next I knew, he and Claude had moved to a cottage in England and then had found a very cheap house in Sommières. He had given up his Foreign Office job and all the security it represented to finish *The Alexandria Quartet*. The brave, gallant Claude was taking the plunge with him to live on a budget of about thirty pounds a month.

Justine had just burst into the literary world with pyrotechnic brilliance. I have a copy of the first edition, dated 1957 and inscribed:

To Mary from Larry,
Stone Cottage,
Donhead
Wilts
first stage!

I was bewildered, dazzled, exasperated by the book. I told Larry that his *Justine* was a preposterous bitch; he laughed and said, "Wait for the rest." When I had finished reading *Clea*, I wrote to him that every woman would want to be loved like Clea. *The Alexandria Quartet* was the most exciting thing that had happened since T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. The world had finally woken up to Lawrence Durrell the author and poet.

Claude was not Clea, although some have thought so; she was herself: a gold and porcelain creature, delicate as a thrush, strong as a thoroughbred. I loved her from the very first moment I met her in Paris, and from then on paid many visits with my children to the Durrells at their Mazet Michel near Nîmes and then at the house in Sommières which has been Larry's home since 1966. Claude's presence haunts that house; Larry says he often hears her laughter at night or her brisk voice calling him.

In August, 1961, *Sappho* was produced for the first time in the

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United Kingdom at the Edinburgh Festival. The only country that had taken the risk of staging Larry's plays before was Germany, where the famous Gustaf Gründgens had directed *Sappho* at the Hamburg theatre with outstanding success. I have only seen photographs of the Gründgens production, but they are dramatic and powerful. Gründgens was an ambiguous man with an even more ambiguous past, but Larry said he was a fabulous theatre director. When Larry wanted to include a live monkey in the play as Diomedes' pet, Gründgens refused flatly: any live animal on a stage would divert the attention of a whole audience. So there never was a monkey in *Sappho*.

Determined to see the Edinburgh production, I travelled with Larry as far as London on what turned out to be a somewhat eventful journey. The travel agent had made a mix-up of the bookings. Instead of finding ourselves on the luxurious (but now extinct) Golden Arrow, we were on a dreary second-rate train which we almost missed, and Larry had to cart my heavy case through miles of rocking corridors. The sea-crossing provided high drama when a woman started shrieking that she couldn't see anything, that she had gone blind. "Hysteria," commented Larry placidly, "she should have read Groddeck." As we approached the English coast, I came out with that weatherworn cliché, "Oh, Larry, I can see the white cliffs of Dover!" "What an incurable romantic you are, Mary," he said more in sadness than in anger. "Pudding Island" had never inspired him with much enthusiasm. The English were suspicious of him as a writer; only the world-wide success of the *Quartet* had forced the critics to admit reluctantly that perhaps Durrell should be taken seriously after all.

The Edinburgh production of *Sappho*, presented by the Bristol Old Vic Company, starring Margaret Rawlings and Nigel Davenport, somehow fell between two stools. Everything was rather flat and genteel; Sappho floated around the stage like a hostess in a Victorian drawingroom. Nonetheless, *Time* magazine reviewed it as "the most outstanding offering of the current Edinburgh Festival . . . [Durrell] makes [Sappho] a sort of marine Justine . . . she is a voracious lover of men. . . . The play's similes and metaphors are full of humor and insight."

In 1964, my protean friend decided to have an exhibition of his paintings in Paris. He had dabbled with the paintbrush for years, signing his works with the *opéra buffa* name of Oscar Epfs. "How ever did you invent such a name?" I asked him. "Because it sounds just like a fart," answered Larry, giving a realistic rendering of the pronunciation. The exhibition was to be held at the Galerie Connaître from the 6th to the 21st March. Nobody was to know that the artist was Lawrence

Durrell; he would only be there to represent his old buddy Oscar Epfs, who was starving somewhere in darkest Africa. Then Claude in a flash of inspiration hit upon the idea that I—of all people—would impersonate the sister of the impecunious artist!

I protested that I could never get away with such an imposture, that I was a rotten actress and a poor liar. "Nonsense, it will all be great fun," Claude insisted. So I did a lot of driving back and forth of Larry and his paintings to the gallery, and even managed to dig up a photograph of a bearded German geologist I had known back in 1941 in Brazzaville—God rest his soul—which was to be shown as a portrait of my destitute genius of a brother.

Heaven knows how I got through that *vernissage*! All Larry's Paris friends were there, including the philosopher Denis de Rougemont and his wife, plus the usual crowd of art critics. Madame de Rougemont, a kindly person, asked me endless embarrassing questions about my poor brother. She was so moved by my faltering answers that she bought a painting. Claude, eyeing me from afar, was scarlet with mirth. Larry was getting immense enjoyment out of describing with growing lyricism the sorrows of Epfs. By the end of the day, all the press had got wise to the hoax: Durrell was the artist, but who was the bearded gent in the photograph? At the party that followed, I could hardly look Madame de Rougemont in the eye, though she was quite happy to know she had bought a Lawrence Durrell painting. Claude was still hilarious at my performance: "I've never seen anyone looking as po-faced as you did, Mary, during that exhibition." The poster of the exhibition hangs in my apartment with decorative ink graffiti sprawled over it and Larry's and Denis de Rougemont's signatures embellishing it. Oscar Epfs' true identity is common knowledge now; and I have never been required to play a fictitious sister again.

The following year we rented a house in Corfu for the summer at Paleocastrizza, where the Durrells spent their holidays. Our respective children were growing up: Larry's Sappho and our Olivia were fourteen; our son Ian was ten; Claude's two children by a previous marriage, Diana and Barry, were a few years older; but they all got on fine together. Larry's and Claude's villa right on the beach was across the road from our very primitive lodgings. Who cared if we had gaslighting, no hot water, hard beds? It was the most wonderful holiday we had ever had. Paleocastrizza was still unspoilt by tourists apart from a few German deep-water divers and a wave of extremely noisy Italians.

As usual, Larry had collected some colourful characters, local and imported. There was Spirou the fisherman, who had assigned himself pro-

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tector of our daughters' virtue; he kept an eagle eye on any potential admirer such as the village policeman, Costa, who was alternately smitten with Sappho or Olivia, and he, Spirou, made a point of escorting them home every evening. Colonel Gigantes of the Greek Sacred Brigade turned up to see his old friend Larry, whom he had known in Rhodes. He was now Greek Minister of Tourism. An outstanding figure of a man with his booming laugh and monocle, he was a legendary hero who had parachuted into occupied Greece during the war without removing that famous monocle. Larry's most touching friend was old Evangelis, the garbage collector with the face of a saint. They would have interminable philosophical discussions over a glass of wine. "Would you believe it!" Larry told us. "That man is happy in his job. He enjoys meeting people when he collects the garbage, they interest him. He is a person of great wisdom."

It was during that holiday that Larry first met Ghislaine de Boysson. She was staying at a nearby hotel with Catha Aldington, Richard Aldington's daughter. Ghislaine was a pretty, petite blonde with a superficial likeness to Claude; yet none of us could imagine that one day she would become Larry's fourth wife.

Things were not always smooth in the Durrell household. There were the occasional *scènes de ménage* due to both Larry's and Claude's hot tempers. The kind, humorous Larry could become very violent when enraged. Some mornings, a tear-stained Claude would come and have breakfast with me. Dishes had flown the night before, though I could never make out why, or who was to blame; a few hours later, the whole incident would be forgotten. Talking about Claude, Larry once said, "What was so marvellous about her was that when I threw a plate at her, she would hurl one back at me."

Claude came to Paris to bid at an auction for the house in Sommières. The Mazet Michel was too small, and the Durrells had always wanted to return to Sommières, where they had been made so welcome during times of hardship. It was a large, spacious home with high ceilings and a rambling, wild-growing garden christened Darjeeling by Larry. Claude had decorated it with loving care and a lot of common sense so that each of them could work in peace or have guests without anyone getting into anyone else's way. A Christmas party was planned, a real English Christmas for which I was requested to provide puddings and mincemeat. An explicit if terse note arrived:

Mary, in this ghastly business could you legislate for enough mince (ugh!) for twelve? Ditto pubbing.

Love
Larry.

LARRY, MY FRIEND

I had just got the stuff off when I received a message saying that all celebrations had been cancelled as Claude had gone off to a clinic in Geneva. I wasn't especially worried, as Claude's health had always been fragile. Then, on New Year's Day, 1967, a sobbing Eve called me from London to say that Claude had died of cancer. They had been on the best of terms; she was as stricken as I was by the brutality of the loss. Live, quicksilver Claude, who was not forty-five, had left us all as swiftly as she had lived. I wept over her in my dreams for a long time; fifteen years later, she still appears with her lovely smile.

However deeply Larry was shocked, there was no doubt he would recover. Nobody who knows him can be unaware of his inner power and strength; he has a personal philosophy of life and death which gives him a rocklike quality against which weak partners can break their heads. He was too strong for Eve or Ghislaine; death was too strong for Claude, his ideal partner.

For Christmas, 1967, a typical Larry surprise arrived through the mail; it was the printer's proof of *Tunc* with all Larry's corrections. I read the unbound pages sprawled on the floor in great discomfort and extreme gratitude.

In the past years, I have been to stay in the Sommières house several times. At the bottom of the garden there is an old tower in which a family of white owls nests, tenderly guarded by their host. On hot summer evenings when friends gather round the pool, white wings swish mysteriously through the trees: Larry's *dames blanches* on their night flight.

One spring I came to sort out and classify the hundreds of books Larry had no further use for. He intended to donate them to some university. We did a heroic job of packing and listing umpteen volumes and deposited them in his cellar. The next I heard, the Vidourle, a stream parched in summer which divides Sommières, had swollen to a furious spring torrent, flooding the town and Larry's cellar. The books were completely wrecked. I cursed myself for my honesty; there were so many of them I would have liked to have carried away quietly, *tant pis!*

If I don't see Larry very often these days, I speak to him regularly on the phone. Age is creeping up on both of us. Health and other problems have besieged me, and when things get too depressing, I ring Sommières to hear Larry crack at me, "Hullo, Mary, are you still alive?" Normally he is in an equable mood, but one time I called before his seventieth birthday, an event that appeared to infuriate him. "Damn cheek celebrating birthdays; it's like someone photographing you naked in your bath!"

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His latest leitmotiv is that he is about to sell his house and go and live in a caravan on a beach, or carry out some other unlikely scheme. Meanwhile, his work progresses at a regular rhythm: he gets up at five in the morning, armed with a thermos of unspeakable instant coffee, and packs up at noon. A man of simplicity, yet with probing intelligence, he can be generous, humorous, sometimes cruel; always he is an indefatigable worker. He once described himself as "a literary adventurer." I have known him for so long and under so many different conditions that it is an effort for me to perceive him as Lawrence Durrell, the literary giant, and not just as Larry, my friend.

¹ Lawrence Durrell, "In Patmos," *Collected Poems, 1931-1974*, ed. James A. Brigham (New York: Viking Press, 1980), p. 207.

² In 1972, Turret Books of London was to publish Durrell's *On the Suchness of the Old Boy*, a poem illustrated by his daughter Sappho. Hence the "blueness" here.

³ Lawrence Durrell, "The Anecdotes, III: At Rhodes," *On Seeming to Presume* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 50.

⁴ Lawrence Durrell, *Reflections on a Marine Venus* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 61.

⁵ *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, p. 94.

Durrell in Córdoba: Jorge Ferreyra Remembers

BY JORGE "MONONO" FERREYRA

Larry Durrell had no great love for Argentina nor its inhabitants. He found them dull, depressing, lacking in *joie de vivre*—characteristics he had also observed among the Egyptian natives. He did not like the climate nor the way the towns were laid out "like chess boards," and was saddened by the look of the houses in small villages. "After all, they all descend from Spaniards and Italians; why do they build such ugly things?"

Of course, he adored Greece, and it was perhaps unfortunate that the boat that brought him to this country stopped first at Rio de Janeiro. Such a sight in those days! He fell immediately in love with Brazil so that arriving at Buenos Aires must have been a sort of anticlimax. Sorry! Many people think of Buenos Aires as a damn beautiful town.

A young writer Enrique "Quique" Revol brought us together and we became friends at first sight. My wife "Bebita" asked Larry to come and stay with us at Casa Norman, a small house in a summer resort at four thousand feet above sea level called Cruz Chica, not far from Córdoba where he was in charge of the British Council, a cultural organization. His wife was a beautiful dark-skinned Egyptian and he a most fascinating and charming person. He was sensitive, and talking with him on any subject was most stimulating; he had the knack of making one feel intelligent too!

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Larry lectured in Cruz Chica, Córdoba, La Plata and other places. I have never heard anybody set such a fast pace without ever pausing or hesitating for the right word, and yet talk so clearly and poetically. His lectures were a treat.

He was a poet and devoted to poetry—"I am an Elizabethan scholar, my dear. I wrote *Cefalû* only to pay for my divorce!"—but he also did short pieces for *Horizon*, the British magazine. He admired Georg Groddeck, a Freud contemporary; years later he even travelled to Austria just to interview Groddeck's widow. He allowed me to read his essay on Groddeck's *The Book of the It* before he mailed the manuscript to *Horizon*. I found it so interesting that I had it typed by the secretary of the local Golf Club, the only person around who had both knowledge of the English language and a typewriter, and sent copies to all my friends in Buenos Aires. I had tuberculosis at the time. I am convinced that reading Groddeck had a great deal to do with recovering my health; I have always held Larry responsible for saving my life!

At the end of the summer he and Eve moved over to Córdoba to a house they rented on Boulevard Chacabuco. Eve did all the work, for Larry was quite incapable of dealing with material things, even such trifles as money. While in Córdoba my wife and I arranged for him to meet William Walton, the English composer, at our house. I have the impression that Walton did not quite agree with the importance that Larry ascribed to the artist's role in shaping the destiny of mankind.

Before they left for England, Larry and his wife stayed with us for a couple of weeks in Buenos Aires at our apartment, Posadas 1053. There he met Eduardo Mallea, considered at the time one of our best writers. At a cocktail party Larry, who was getting bored, amazed and rather shocked the somewhat stiff and conservative *porteños* by taking his shoes off and improvising a toe dance. It was a good party.

Larry has no memory for names of people and places. I mentioned once the name of an attractive girl who used to picnic and go horseback riding with us in the hills surrounding Cruz Chica. It meant nothing to him. "I wonder why I have suppressed her," he said.

Larry had a secret vice: painting. I managed to recover two of several pictures he left behind. The two pictures hang on the walls of the guest room of my house in Malagueño. "I'll paint pink elephants next," he liked to say. He also played the piano and once composed a comic tune called "I am so sad."

In the early fifties while in St. Moritz I tried to travel to Zagreb where he had been posted. He sounded unhappy in his new diplomatic job. Ten years elapsed before I saw him in his house near Nîmes. We

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drank a lot of Veuve Cliquot. "I have enough money now to buy shoes for my children during the next two hundred years." When we met the last time at the Café Flore in Paris, 1967, he had grown quite broader and seemed to have increased his capacity for absorbing scotch in almost the same proportion. He was in very good humour, witty and charming as ever. I miss him.

Larry's Long Siesta of 1948

BY RAÚL VICTOR PELÁEZ

Lawrence Durrell in Argentina; The British Council; Buenos Aires big city; Córdoba not so big, right in the middle of pampas, mountains and valleys, far away from everything and far away from everybody; an ocean away from Europe; two tropics away from Miller; another ocean plus a big sea away from Corfu; no people to talk to among that crowd of foreigners; England and France so far away from that colonial town founded by the Jesuits long, long ago, with its convents, university and many churches and many plazas and many Córdobaes descended from the Spanish conquistadores way back four hundred years, and Larry there, in Córdoba, summer 1948. Summer in January, not in June!

Córdoba in summer. Never so dry and dusty. The Pampero wind blowing your brains away; Pampero headache not so cruel after five, six generations. You get used to it. No time for Larry to survive another Pampero so far away . . . so far away . . .

The big world was just recovering from a horrid War. People were eager to move no matter where. Europe came to America and we went to Europe.

This might be a rather acceptable explanation of Larry's inconceivable move to take a position as director of one of the many centers sponsored by the British Council, where so many people in the world learnt the words of this language I am writing now, to remember with joy and gratitude the privilege of sitting at Larry's "Special Seminars on the Limerick's Metric System" or sharing with him and other ten or twelve so-called students several hundreds of cups of tea sitting around a table at the library of the "Asociación Argentina de Cultura Británica" on Boulevard San Juan 137, Córdoba, Argentina (still there after forty years).

Larry succeeded a very thin and pale Oxford scholar, a Mr. So and

LARRY'S LONG SIESTA OF 1948

So Blackburn, M.A., so skinny he was, that when he crossed his legs he could make a knot ending in two feet. And then Larry, so round and quick like mercury.

His introduction to his Special Seminar was a limerick of his own invention that marked the tone and tempo of that year in the unique company of a man who was different from most of the people I knew so far, who thought faster, spoke faster and did everything faster than any body else.

I never saw Larry sitting down or relaxing crossing his legs, his hands on his neck looking at the ceiling like Mr. Blackburn, the Oxford scholar. NO. He was always on the move, going from his office to the library, talking to two people standing in opposite corners of the room, and always saying, saying, saying something shocking or funny or unique, using words you never heard before, long words and small words saying something new, always new and always different. He left a mark to remember for life; his ever-changing expression; his face, so round, with a smile in the middle; his eyes so alive, so pure; his voice.

I saw Larry almost every day from March to December 1948 except some periods of four to ten days when he disappeared with the excuse of lectures or gatherings or meetings outside of Córdoba.

One of those absences which extended more than usual was reported by one of his closest admirers—a young lady, of course—more or less as it follows:

I know, I know and I know! Larry is in bed taking a siesta since last Friday. Today . . . let's see!!! five, six days!!! and he won't move from bed . . . He told the British Council . . . He called them long distance to Buenos Aires and told them he won't get up until they send him the ticket to go back to England. Imagine. Everybody is anxious to know . . . You know his contract; two months yet to finish . . . Even Clifford is shocked. To do such a thing. Unbelievable!

As a matter of fact, most of Larry's year in Córdoba was for him a long siesta far away from that living world of constant creation moving at the speed of his own intense and continuous light.

Many people in this far southern end of the round earth will always remember with love and nostalgia Larry's sparkling passage, so brief and so intensely alive.

Lawrence Durrell: A Celebration

BY JAMES STERN

Dear Larry,

Now that I know where you are, and have learned how young you are: 75 not out! Here are our heartfelt congratulations! Now for your century!

May I suggest that we celebrate your year not with a review of your world-famous works, but with a sharing of personal memories. Before embarking on this pleasant task, I'd like to jog yours for a moment; it is just thirty years since you, in that one year, published no fewer than four books, for one of which, *Bitter Lemons*, you were awarded the annual Duff Cooper Memorial Prize. This Prize was presented to you personally by the Queen Mother, and took the shape of a specially-bound copy of Duff Cooper's *Old Men Forget*.

Yes, dear Larry, please bear this in mind and forgive me when I do just that! However, I do believe that this Old Man's memory can be relied upon for places and dates. For instance, I doubt that I ever told you that it will be sixty years ago this summer (when I guess little Larry was a school boy in India) that I first set foot in that most delectable of all *les Villes de Provence*, where you have lived for so long, and where you last greeted Tania and me over a bottle of champagne, in October 1972!

But how, when, and where did we three first greet each other? Well, on our return to England for good (sic) after some 17 years in the United States, we were living a few miles from my elderly parents in your much despised "dead as mutton" Dorset. Our rented "home" was a noisy roadside cottage outside Sturminster Newton, conveniently next door to a Pub, and across the River Stour from the house where Thomas Hardy had written *The Return of the Native*.

And here the forgetful Old Man hopes to cease taxing his memory; he started keeping a Diary, according to which, on the evening of the

A CELEBRATION

16th of October 1956 you appeared at our door in the company of our charming mutual friend, Diana Ladas, who was living no more than a couple of miles from where I am writing these lines. And you, it seems, were renting a cottage belonging to Diana next door to hers.

That evening the four of us evidently spent, what was for this one at least, a delightful 2½ hours discussing mutual friends or acquaintances, most if not all of whom were writers living, I need hardly tell you, in La Belle France! Among them James Joyce, Bob McAlmon, Laurence Vail, Eugene Jolas, Sam Beckett and, at greatest length, Henry Miller! Why, you wondered, had no one written a physical description of the Joyces? Today I wonder how you knew, and why you wondered!

Changing the subject, you then embarked on the Climate of Greece, one element of which I had always suspected: how, on account of what you called its "magnesium" light, it is an impossible land for painters. And you concluded these first happy hours together by asking what today I find as odd a question as I imagine I did all those years ago: could I find for you a photo of my friend Djuna Barnes?

On the following Wednesday, the last day of that October, you invited us to tea in your "tiny" cottage, where we met your beautiful French Claude, herself a writer, and a mighty good one, as I can testify from her few treasured letters.

(Hold it! Tania is champing at the bit to get a word in! She wishes me to tell you that her most vivid memory of Claude is of her sitting with us under the trees of the Vieux Moulin, facing the Pont-du-Gard, Claude looking as lovely as ever in a pale blue dress!)

... Again you and I seem to have steered straight for our mutual chum, Henry Miller, to whom you had been introduced in 1937 by one more mutual friend, Anaïs Nin. To this day Anaïs to me is the friend who lived on a "barge" on the Seine on the other side of the Pont Neuf from where we lived, on the Quai de l'Horloge. And Anaïs was not only a novelist, she was the first woman to write a book about D. H. Lawrence, published in Paris in 1932.*

At Anaïs's death just ten years ago her house was described in the London *Times* obituary as "a meeting place for her close friends, among them Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller—whom she supported while he was writing his first books."

* Two additional books about Lawrence and by women were to appear in 1932: Catherine Carswell's *The Savage Pilgrimage* and Mabel Dodge Luhan's *Lorenzo in Taos*.

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Now, dear Larry, at the end of that evening you informed us that you were going into hiding in order to begin writing a new book, and that you'd phone us when you felt satisfied with what you'd managed to do.

Just twenty-seven days later the phone rang: you had written 80,000 words since we had last seen you! And to think that these words comprised your first masterpiece *Justine*—a bomb of a book which completely bowled me over and which our friend John Davenport, in his review, had “no hesitation in calling a great novel.” Your inscribed copy, lying beside me as I write, is one of our most precious possessions. You added on the phone that day that you now had six books waiting for publication in America. But (believe it or not!) you could not find a New York publisher!

You were then in your forty-fifth year! For your seventy-fifth, dear Larry, we send you our congratulations, our admiration, our longing to hear from you, if possible to see you again—before it's too late!

Jimmy Stern

Un Dauphin Nommé Larry

BY F.-J. TEMPLE

J'ai encore la vision très nette de ma rencontre avec Larry. C'était en 1957 au mois de juillet. J'étais allé prendre chez lui Richard Aldington, l'auteur de *Death of a Hero* et poète imagiste connu, ami de D. H. Lawrence. Dans la vérandah de la Villa des Rosiers, la maison même où je suis né, Richard discutait avec un homme râblé, de petite taille, au visage ouvert et à l'oeil rieur. Il me présenta Lawrence Durrell et me demanda la permission de l'inviter avec nous pour un déjeuner que nous devions prendre chez moi à la campagne. Ce déjeuner fut le point de départ d'une nouvelle époque de ma vie.

Ce qui m'avait tout de suite frappé, c'était le climat de liberté dans lequel vivait Larry. Dans la Villa Louis, où il vécut avec Claude, au début de leur installation en Languedoc, il était dénué de tout. Il arrivait de Chypre avec les vêtements qu'il portait, ses archives personnelles et sa machine à écrire. Qu'importe! Il était libre de travailler à sa guise. Plus tard, après que la gloire l'ait auréolé, je l'ai vu, dans un film de Margaret McCall à la BBC, *The Lonely Roads*, où dans le sillage d'un vagabond, il parlait de la liberté. Encore aujourd'hui, il se sent libre, il n'appartient à personne, ne subit aucune tutelle, écrit ce qu'il veut, refuse ce qu'il veut. A 75 ans, il voit très lucidement la juste proportion des choses, avec une philosophie bien personnelle dans laquelle l'Inde et la Grèce jouent un rôle de premier plan.

La célébrité n'écrase pas ce citoyen des garrigues méditerranéennes: "J'aurais pu écrire deux fois mieux et ne pas vendre un seul exemplaire", a-t-il déclaré un jour au *Sunday Telegraph*. Pour Larry la réussite est une sorte de "cambriolage".

Nous, hommes du Sud, au bord de la Méditerranée, sommes plus que d'autres capables d'entrer de plein pied dans l'oeuvre de Durrell; nous y trouvons des paysages familiers, sous le même ciel que celui de la

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Grèce, et dans les bosquets de lentisques et d'alaternes, les même dieux regardent vivre tout un peuple de bergers, de pêcheurs, de poètes, de vigneron, d'herboristes, qui ont traversé les siècles. A la fin de *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, on trouve une liste des fleurs de l'Île de Rhodes: anémones pourpres, crocus sauvages, iris lie-de-vin, narcisses, orchidées, bruyère blanche, asphodèles, soucis, giroflées, genêts, thym, capres, cistes, etc. Toutes ces plantes pourraient figurer dans un récit sur nos terres du Sud. On les retrouvera, sans aucun doute, dans le livre que Larry écrit sur la Provence. D'ailleurs, dès le début, il s'est senti chez lui ici. Il a tout de suite flairé "l'esprit des lieux". Ce païen libéré est habile à distinguer les effluves primordiaux, les déesses sylvestres, les vins parfumés, les rois déguisés en bergers. Je l'ai vu se transformer en dauphin, entre deux vagues, aux Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, en aegyptien dans les taillis de chênes verts. Sa maison de pierre sèche, qu'il reconstruisit de ses propres mains, ressemblait à ce qu'était le palais d'Ulysse à Ithaque, et je me souviens que, par les chaudes nuits d'été, nous imitions le cri de la petite chouette, ce qui attirait aussitôt Athena-aux-yeux-pers qu'on entendait voleter dans les branchages proches.

Larry vient d'avoir 75 ans, mais il me semble voir toujours en lui l'homme jeune et prime-sautier dont le grand rire emplissait nos cœurs comme un bon vin dionisiaque. D'emblée j'avais fait de ses joies les miennes, et j'ai porté le crêpe de ses deuils. Qu'importe s'il est devenu un écrivain mondialement célèbre. Après trente ans d'amitié je ne vois toujours en lui que le "Jupiter junior" tel que le décrit, "fresh from Corfu, with the Ionian tan still on his face and hands", notre vieil ami Alfred Perlès.

Je lève mon verre à Jupiter, et je bois à nos souvenirs vivants.

Durrell in California

BY ANAÏS NIN

This selection of passages by and about Lawrence Durrell from The Diary of Anaïs Nin was made by Rupert Pole, literary executor of Anaïs Nin, who died in 1977. The visits described took place during Durrell's three-month sojourn in California in 1974.

Letter from Lawrence Durrell:

Nothing that happened to me in Los Angeles gave so much delight as to hear your voice again and to think that with your characteristic generosity you had decided to forgive me my shortcomings and think only of our long and affectionate association and friendship. Wonderful! Thank you, dear artist. We spoke much about you as always, Henry and I, and of course we saw once again the beautiful film which Snyder has made of you, and where you speak with such force of my favorite woman, Lou! I have always thought of you as a sort of incarnation of Lou Salomé in your knowledge of and feeling for artists. Why has not more justice been done to her name? It is a great mystery to me. Even Henry, who is very curious about her, can find nothing except one rotten and pretentious biography. . . . Perhaps you will manage to rectify this state of affairs.

On the way back a strike at Paris diverted all planes so that it is actually in Geneva that I am writing this hasty and rather scrappy letter of thanks and solidarity. I think the Artaud film will be a good one, and it is a thousand pities that you were not in it. We were working mostly in

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French for an all-European viewing, which made the whole projecting somehow more congenial. The level of intelligence I suppose was the key really—and consequently you should really have been up center of stage. Never mind. They seemed very happy with what they got, the French.

Tomorrow I take the train back to my gloomy old house in Sommières. When you are next in Europe, please come and stay with me if the mood for country life is on you. I don't have to tell you how much pleasure that would give.

.

Encounter with Larry:

I had forgotten how he parries off with humor, how he talks to be amusing, not out of feeling. He has no sense of reality of others. He lives in his intellectual Buckminster Fuller domes.

.

Visit to Durrells. Ghislaine is delightful. They were loaned a house on the beach. She is amusing and friendly and cooked a fine lunch. Larry was in a good mood. We all talked and laughed, told stories, compared memories, wondered why Henry defends and loves all the shabby characters who are not loyal to him: Hoki, Robitaille, others. After many years he became angry at the Japanese.

Larry and I had an amusing exchange, understandable only to writers. I was describing adventures in Cambodia to disprove his statement that films give us everything. At the end he said: "You wrote about it, I hope." We laughed at our unconcern for the cuts made in our articles for travel magazines. "I can always use them in a travel book," said Larry. "I can always use it in the Diary," I said. Nothing wasted. Like seamstresses saving bits of textiles.

His story of how he read my Diaries does not match my record. He says a chauffeur in a uniform came carrying two tall piles of Diaries. We never had a chauffeur, and I would not let anyone carry the Diaries just like that in his arm. And I wouldn't give my sacred Diaries to any chauffeur, least of all a bank one! The originals were in the bank vault, but I kept typed copies in a metal box at home which he described as my black children.

He clings to his tenacious fantasy about my wealth. My memory is that on Quai de Passy I opened the Morisco wedding chest and let him

DURRELL IN CALIFORNIA

read the "black children." The Diary will settle the point for me, not for him. These affirmations were at the root of early quarrels; he told the same story when I visited him in the South of France.

But he loves Lou Andreas-Salomé and hates as violently as I do Rudolph Binion, Frau Lou's prejudiced biographer. Wants to torpedo him. He can do that for the newsletter. Ghislaine caricatured Larry's science students at Cal Tech. We talked about the problem of protecting Henry from unscrupulous biographers who go around saying they are "authorized." Larry was mellow, tender and humorous.

He dismisses our fear that a madman like Nixon would push the annihilating button of the atom bomb when we push him to the wall by impeachment. He said: "Oh, I'm so bored, it would be a relief." How can Larry be bored? He has just finished a novel. He has been pampered and honored. He received an advance of \$50,000. He has a delightful wife. He is admired and solidly established in literature.

He said he did not begin a diary at twenty-eight because I told him not to, that it was a trick, that I only believed my life real when I began to write about it. That was true at one time, but no longer. It is not when I write it that our lunch becomes real, but when it happens. When Ghislaine opened the first bottle of champagne in the sunlight and we looked out to sea, Larry said he had never had the sea *and* comfort.

Our evening with Henry was warm and lively. Henry has lost the sight of one eye during surgery. His legs are weak, so he uses a walking chair. He is in his blue pajamas and kimono. He tells the story of Caresse Crosby's house in the South, of Dali and his wife, of Caresse's alcoholic husband arriving in the middle of the night to throw everyone out. All our stories [of the same event] differ. *Rashomon*. Larry incites him.

When Larry uses the word "boredom," I'm startled. Is the veil of neurosis cutting off his enjoyments? I am never bored. I don't know the feeling. Everything interests me. And there is so much yet to see, love, experience. He has everything and it came to him ten years earlier than for me. Today, at seventy-one, I'm invited to the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

While Henry and Larry incensed each other, the women discovered me.

Larry talked about a discussion with Joaquin in the thirties on wanting to achieve polyphony. Joaquin said it could not be achieved in writing: "Don't try to be a Mozart." But Larry did try and describes it in

TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

an interview as "palimpsest." Is he aware that I have done it? He has gone into intellectual abstractions (*Tunc*). He is sterile. With time could I have reconnected him? His defenses, humor and impersonality are slippery.

Letter to Larry

Marseille
14/3/87

Dear Larry,

Your birthday went by this year without the usual festivities and merriment. Bad weather (the *snow*!) and a bad cold deprived us of our meal at the "Pont Romain," the restaurant in Sommières you prefer.

I was fretting over this when my eye met with a card just above my table which reads:

Meilleur
Voeux ★
Claude et
Lawrence
Durrell
et Oscar Epfs

Oscar Epfs! I've forgotten the year this famous painter had an expo in Paris, to which you were invited. It was a great success. People came up to ask you what you thought of him . . . Later, back in Sommières, we couldn't stop laughing as you described the scene, how you answered or received the criticisms, all the while asking where Oscar Epfs was and would he be coming?!

Was the mystery ever cleared? I don't know, but it can't be a secret any more. D'ailleurs Oscar Epfs was not an orphan, for in due course appeared a plump lady you introduced as Mrs. Epfs. You said she was the most wonderful woman you had ever met. She would stay exactly where you put her, never utter a sound (and presumably not claim alimony in case . . .). Well, generally Mrs. Epfs was to be found floating on her back in the pool. In summer we would gather round the pool and admire her as she slowly revolved, arms and legs widely spread (surely for balance) on the water.

One evening, you were sitting with a glass in your hand (I've never seen you seated otherwise) while the "children" (Sapphy, Diana and Barry—Penny was in England) and I basked in the sun. Quite

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unexpectedly you sprang from your chair (leaving your drink—quite courageous, that . . .) and jumped into the pool, onto Mrs. Epfs's tummy, which you tried to get a firm hold of—an impossible feat as the rubber when wet was too slippery—so you disappeared under her and came up the other side spluttering and crying: “I love you! I *love* you! I lo-o-ve you!!” amid the screams of uncontrollable laughter.

Mrs. Epfs said not a word.

It was in summer. One of the many happy summertimes I shared with you and your family.

All my love,

Catherine Aldington

Preserving the Archive

BY ALAN G. THOMAS

When I first met Lawrence Durrell he had only published, if that is the right word, *Ten Poems*, sold by J. A. Allen at his Bloomsbury bookshop—but I had absolute faith in him from the first, a belief shared by our dear and mutual friend, Dr. Theodore Stephanides—and I preserved every piece of paper bearing his writing. So much for my collection, but this piece is about the preservation of his own archive.

When the Durrells left Bournemouth for Corfu, Larry, knowing my bibliophily, announced that one should travel light through life, and that he proposed to tear the favourite pages out of his books and bind them up in two volumes—one verse, one prose. Watching my horror with a gleam of friendly malice, he went on to suggest that I should buy the residue of his library for stock. After all, most volumes would still contain ninety per cent of their pages, and I should surely be able to offer ninety per cent of their value.

While clearing up he threw the corrected proofs of *Pied Piper of Lovers* into the waste-paper basket. "Don't do that!" I almost screamed, "You're destroying literary history." He picked up the proofs and handed them to me with a gesture and a grin which seemed to say, "If you're such an ass as to preserve this rubbish, take it." That was the foundation of my own Durrell collection.

Larry left some papers with me, including now-lost short stories. He wrote from Corfu to ask for them. Having little faith in his capacities as a preserver of anything at all, I dragged my feet. Finally he wrote in a fury and I sent them out. These, along with the rest of his papers, were left behind in Corfu when he fled to Alexandria and were used, by the occupying German troops, to light fires.

Hurt by this loss, he appointed me (though not in so many words), as the guardian of his archive. As he moved around the world packages

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would arrive from Greek islands, Alexandria, Argentina, Yugoslavia and, finally, Provence. By this time I had married and bought a house with a capacious loft. Whenever Larry came to Bournemouth, where his family still lived, he would spend hours—even days—in the loft, reviewing his past life. Alan Pringle would write from Fabers asking, "Would you mind going up into the loft and sending the manuscript of . . . ?" Parcels came to me, too, from Fabers.

When Larry settled, as he thought, in Cyprus, a great part of all this material was sent out to him but, as all readers of his moving *Bitter Lemons* will know, this was not to be, and the archive came back to my loft. When, later on, he proposed to settle in Provence, he planned to have everything sent to Sommières. I teased him that whenever he chose to live in a place, political troubles followed. The war in Algeria was raging, and I said that, if I sent out his archive, the Algerians would invade Southern France. However, my packer, Charles Eldecott, came up from the shop, and Larry's third wife, Claude, organised the despatch.

After Claude's early and untimely death, Larry decided to disencumber himself of possessions and asked me to arrange the sale of his archive.

My wife, Shirley, and I drove down to Sommières and spent a happy week staying with Larry—then loaded the car with many wine cartons filled with documents. I asked Larry about insurance, which is very heavy on goods in transit. He replied, "Oh, to hell with that." I determined only to eat in restaurants from which we could watch the car, and only stay in hotels with a lock-up garage.

Our first stop was at Tain l'Hermitage, at a café on the bank of the Rhone. We were chatting, as far as my limited French allowed, with the *patron*, when we saw some smoke going up and, belatedly, realised that it was our car. We rushed across, and I started to use our little fire extinguisher on the flames which were rapidly approaching the petrol tank which lay under the cartons of archive material in the back of the car. Suddenly the *patron* came running across the road with a large fire extinguisher with which he successfully completed the job. Not only that, he called an efficient friend who ran a garage and arranged for the car to be repaired—and then booked us into a comfortable neighbouring hotel. The garage obtained the necessary parts from Lyons and we were, amazingly, on the road again within twenty-four hours.

At home, I proceeded to sort out and catalogue the archive. The general picture of a poet is of a man living in totally disorganised

PRESERVING THE ARCHIVE

squalor. Larry is not in the least like that. He has an inborn sense of order, disciplined and developed by years spent in the Foreign Service. Further, Claude was one of the most efficient women who ever lived. So, to a great extent, the papers were already sorted. Other papers, which had accumulated since the move to Provence, I sorted in and then proceeded with the fascinating job of making a catalogue.

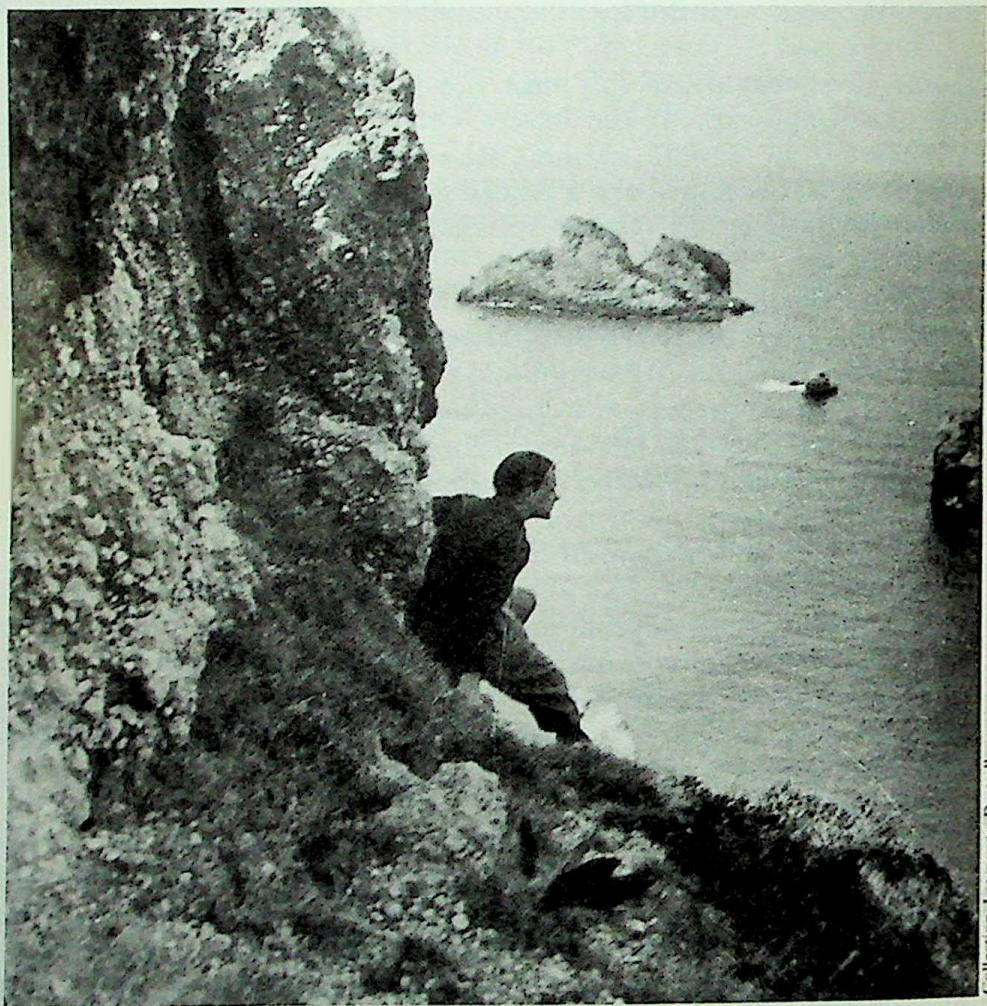
There were typescripts of major books, notebooks, magazine articles, little magazines, photographs, letters from friends, etc., etc. The most important of the letters were the letters of Henry Miller, accompanied by a note to me, "Guard this, Alan, with your life. I treasure it." This note bore a drawing of a man being hanged, which would have been my well-deserved fate had I lost this precious collection.

When George Wickes came to edit the Durrell-Miller Letters he wrote, "Happily for posterity, Thomas decided on the stable and acquisitive profession of antiquarian bookselling and kept Durrell's papers, including the letters from Miller, in his loft, safely out of bomb's reach through the war." Writing in America, Wickes did not realise that the papers survived because they were in the loft of my home, not in the loft of my bookshop. The latter was set on fire by the Luftwaffe during a Sunday raid on Bournemouth.

When Larry is writing and comes into a mental block he stops and makes a non-representational drawing in brilliant coloured inks. There were a number of these, some of them on the covers of exercise books. Basil Taylor, the art critic and historian, happened to be staying with us once and noticed one of these drawings: "I am always interested in drawings by highly-charged personalities who are not professional artists."

I first offered the archive to the University of California at Los Angeles. Larry Powell, when librarian there, had been one of the first Americans to recognise Larry's writing and one of the first to collect his works. Through Powell's friendship with Henry Miller, many Miller papers were already at U.C.L.A., and Powell's personal Durrell collection ended at that Library. I felt it would be satisfactory to all if the Durrell archive joined the others. However, this was turned down by Powell's successor, to the chagrin of Robert A. Potter and Brooke Whiting who had compiled a catalogue of the U.C.L.A. collection.

Finally, through the efforts of Anthony Rota, the archive was purchased by the Morris Library of Southern Illinois University, where it remains as a most precious mine for Durrell students.



Collection Lawrence Durrell

Lawrence Durrell on Corfu, ca. 1937



Mary Mollo

Lawrence Durrell conversing with Evangelis, "the garbage collector with the face of a saint," Paleocastrizza, Corfu, 1965

Letters to T. S. Eliot

Ionian Bank, Corfu, Greece, July, 1937

Dear Mr Eliot:

Thank you very much for your kind letter. I value your good opinion of the Black Book; and rejoice in the hopes expressed for my future. I am not at all sure that I have one, to tell the truth. By this I don't mean that I can't write better books in future, but simply that my problems are not technical but personal. It remains only to see whether I develop as a person; the mere writing is nothing compared to the grind of the personality against its own sicknesses. Miller wrote to me recently and said: "You see, writing you don't need to worry about. You *are* a writer—at present too much of a one. You need only to become more and more yourself, in life and on paper. That will alter the writing radically, but very naturally. Don't make any effort. I feel you make too tremendous an effort always. Not in a bad sense, mind you—but wrongly, from any stand point of automatic perfection, which lies at the basis of all writing."

I feel that that expresses perfectly for me the Black Book with its violent movement from zone to zone, its turgid passages—everything. What is imperfect in it is what remains imperfect in myself. You will see from this what a serious business it is!!

About the actual book. If the English edition didn't stand in the way of a simultaneous unexpurgated Paris edition I would be only too glad for Fabers to take it. I can't imagine any better home for it. All this, however, I have gone into thoroughly in my letter to Pringle. It remains only to thank you again for your letter. It isn't every day that an author can feel his publishers backing him with such general goodwill and spontaneous friendliness. It is a compliment which overwhelms me and

The two outstanding contemporary influences on Durrell were T. S. Eliot and Henry Miller. He had long and fascinating correspondences with each. Eliot was his poetry editor at Fabers and a generous mentor as well. These letters are published with the kind permission of Mrs. T. S. Eliot, to whom they belong.

LETTERS TO T. S. ELIOT

which I have difficulty in getting over. Believe me, I am extremely grateful.

Yours Sincerely,
Lawrence Durrell

XIX RUE GAZAN. PARIS XIV.

November. ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo Saturday [1938]

DEAR MR ELIOT:

Many thanks for your letter; no, I did not hope very much to publish the essay in the Criterion, knowing it to be long as well as impertinent; impertinent, I mean in its attempt to bite off a huge section of an impossibly huge subject, and compress it into ten thousand words. I must explain. This thing was written in a few days, and almost straight down; it was an attempt to state what Miller calls 'this whole God business' in a single pill. Behind this hangs the amusing story of Miller's own attempt to state it—the vast Lawrence book—which will never, I believe, present a finished thesis: a logical argument from premiss to conclusion. He can only be creatively critical—which is what the Leavis of this world would call rotten criticism. I tried to pitch myself somewhere between the two, to present something that looked like reason and was really a defense of unreason. Of course there is nothing new to the idea; the ground is ploughed out firm and true in Bergson, Spengler, Nietzsche: more recently in Jung, Rank, Crookshank, and so on. It was only that I felt the necessity for a synthesis, a comprehensible *pill*, important today for the poet to swallow. I attach no importance to it except as a five-finger exercise. I have never believed much in the mind as a medium of communication: what is written from the abdomen, as it were, finds its answer in other abdomens! What is explained is simply understood without contact. One sees the scenery at a glance, I feel, or not at all; but today it is fashionable to *deduce* scenery, and act out one's dramas before this imaginary backcloth.

In my treatment of the Windsors it was not sheer damned impertinence those dismissals of big men. I took the easier target always to illustrate the theme and left the larger. Such is the case with Lewis. To demolish him would take time and space and anger. Huxley, on the other hand, has demolished himself already: there remains simply a

TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

ruin around which the literary tourist can walk, seeing all that there is to see.

The dismissals, yes. I blush rather for my dogmatic youth. But there is something serious to be said against Lewis. As a *writer* he is very big; as an artist he feels to me at bottom *uncertain of himself*; as a man of God, he does not exist. That wretched book *Men Without Art*, for example: or even *Time AND WESTERN MAN*. He is demolishing, I feel, always out of fear: he has a sort of strident, neurotic health which one is always mistaking for the real thing. I wish someone would have a go at him in his own way: his theses are simply soft cheese—at any rate they seem so to me. I don't think, for example, he really knows what art is: it is simply a 'practice'. This single prefatory remark of Spengler is enough to blow up the whole of *Time and Western Man*, for example: "... Our awe in the face of mystery denies us the satisfaction of thinking dissections are the same as penetrations. Of course the idea of pessimism is raised at once ... But I have not written for people who imagine that delving for the springs of action is the action itself; **THOSE WHO MAKE DEFINITIONS DO NOT KNOW DESTINY.**"

I would like to deal with Lewis in detail some time; the tendency is to be polite to him, and feel ignorant beside his erudition, and a little afraid of the satiric barb: but I feel he has got more to answer for than anyone else among us *Men Without Art*. A pity that no one makes him sit up a little. These egomaniac nightmares all seem to me to be a sort of self-assertive fear on his part. **POTENTIALLY**, of course, he is a really very great man: but he lacks *pneuma* [sic] somehow.

With Pound I confess to a blind spot in me. I have never been able to see him as anything but a very gifted literary gent: I admire *Mauberley* and all that—but in the same way that I admire Canon John Gray or Dowson. I feel always about art that it must rape me, as it were, squeeze me dry: like John Donne addressing Lord God in the religious sonnets. With Pound there is delicate accomplishment, music, harmony—but no ultimate question of God behind it all. I think his recent social credit manoeuvres bear this out a little: no less of course than his 'specialism in genius'. As for the detestable jargon of the essays—I turn the other cheek! He is not a very great 'thinker', I feel; and compared to any great artist ranks simply as a marvellous goliard—a good man—an entertainer. As my spirit-measure in the essay was the God-feeling I didn't treat him at all. I think, after all, he would look a little shabby in such company.

Your apprehension as to my direction is another proof of your interest in me: for which I am grateful. I need only explain that I do not

LETTERS TO T. S. ELIOT

intend to continue along this straight and narrow path very far. My job is to throw myself over precipices. But there come long intervals of exhaustion and sterility when to sit down and do something reasonably secure like using one's mind is a great blessing. I would knit for preference—but the other brings me money: and now and again I get an amusing idea which is quite fertile: as in the Lao Tzu essay. All this, of course, is just waiting for the other, the exhausting thing, to start working on me with its hatchet. These intervals of fear and weariness are hard to bear with equanimity. This, of course, is simply to reassure you that there is no hardening of the arteries on my part; and to thank you for the very nice letter.

Very Sincerely Yours,
Lawrence Durrell

P. S. I would be delighted naturally if you could find anything in the BB which was suitable for the Criterion.

P. P. S. and I agree that one (rather we, Miller and I) DO attach too much importance to Lawrence. I love him because he is a rotten artist at bottom! He is concerned with something that is beyond either his art or himself. I like the struggle in him—the heroic struggle. There are few like him in that quality!

Sincerely
Lawrence Durrell

c/o Henry Miller, 18 Villa Seurat, Paris XIVE [Dec. 1938]

Dear Mr. Eliot:

Many thanks for your letter; I don't know quite how to answer it. I only sent in the portion from the new book because I felt that Kahane had forced me to let you down over the Black Book excerpt and I wanted to atone by letting you have a piece of the new child, equal if not better in temper and style. I don't see quite what it has to do with Faber ultimately publishing the book. If, however, the extract does not seem startling enough please send it back—as I have no copy of it, and need the whole book with me before proceeding with it. I was also in quest of the money which Kahane lost me by holding up the proofs of the other book. The question puzzles me a little . . . one is too post-publication, the other too pre-publication. . . . You seem a trifle hard to please, but

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no doubt you have excellent reasons to curb my impatience. I shall try you next with an essay on Rank.

I was looking forward to meeting you again, because I feel that a talk with you now and again is a great help to me, living as I do miles from the english and their horrid ways; and having so few contacts in england which I value. I regret that my appearance found you snowed under with engagements. Perhaps when I come back we could meet for a little while; I would like awfully to introduce Anais Nin to you. I think perhaps you would be interested in her as a person. Pringle made a sly face or two because he thought for a moment that she had MSS secreted in her blouse ready to launch at poor Faber once she was in; but I think by the time we left he was at rest on the score. Anais herself was rather bowled over by him as the specimen of what the young english publisher should be!

I am sorry my impertinent accents creep in amongst God's dictums; but being over-old in my young skin I always feel apologetic about speaking from my inner spring; hence the ironic mask. As soon as I look as venerable as I almost am I will drop all that. It comes of a bottomless sense of self-limitation; and from the fact that people see a bumptious boy in me more readily than a painful firework man. All this will change. In the meantime here I am minus a beard trying to plough a deucedly bearded furrow!

The new book so far is printable; only superstition prevents me letting it be read until it is done.* I can't say what the puppets will do in advance since they have their destiny as I have mine. And I learn in life from their actions in fiction. I hope sincerely that Faber will be able to do the book. The style will not be inferior in any way to that of the Black Book; and the poise should be twice as divine. More than that I can't honestly say because I don't honestly know.

If this letter sounds a trifle despondent it is because today Miller has just received a cutting from American Time in which we are linked together and flayed for being mere smut-hounds!

My good wishes and thanks ever,

Lawrence Durrell

* Durrell is probably referring to "The Book of the Dead" here, a never-completed and unpublished precursor to *The Alexandria Quartet*.

LETTERS TO T. S. ELIOT

140 Camden Hill Road, NOTTING HILL GATE. LONDON.
 Saturday [21 Jan. 1939]

Dear Mr Eliot:

I regard the whole thing with dark suspicion. The people who know me would never give me anything—except perhaps an anaesthetic to shut me up. The people who don't know me always imagine from the tone of my prose that God wrote it, and would be therefore unlikely to send me anything so material as money. I suggest that it is a fellow-writer trying to buy back his introduction to me. If so could you perhaps extract an extra fiver in exchange for a written contract from me never to recognise him in the street? It is all very exciting. Lord! as Davies remarks in his collected poems, how strange and wild the times are now!

I wanted to write you a little note when I read your touching and dignified editorial to the last Criterion: to tell you what a loss it is to writing. But this you already know. I have often cursed the Criterion in my black moods, but now that it has ceased I recognize the big part it played in literature by its temperance and justice and quietness. In the same way that a rebellious child does not recognize the justice of its parents until it loses them.

I am sorry, too, that you feel so hopeless about the times, as you say. But I hope it is only a periodic dip in the graph, since you yourself are in the vanguard of those who desire a new heaven and earth, if not actually in the world, at least in their own spirits. It sounds gauche but I mean it firmly. And to be a big artist (i.e. *responsible*) must be as much of a strain as to be a *guru*, which is the same thing. A young man's admiration is an inadequate thing to offer, but I send it to you for what it is worth; and my thanks as always.

Yours Sincerely,
 Lawrence Durrell

P S Graham Howe's new book epitomises the conversation of the other evening with wonderful lucidity; I suppose you have seen it, however, as it is a Faber book.

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Alexandria, May 5, 1945

Dear T.S.E.

In a recent letter from poor Mr. Stewart he says that Prospero will be ready for July. Whether he meant in galley or actually I don't know. I am not much concerned about proofs because Fabers are so good and painstaking—and Lambros could perhaps vet the Greek. But in case you are producing straight there are two passages which might prejudice my return to Greece and which I would like deleted. Towards the end of the book the old count sees me reading McKenzie and says "The Royalists will let us down again, you'll see. *They are our Bulgarian element.*" Please delete the latter phrase. Also in the Epilogue I mention Elie Papadimitriou and Miquette Averoff, the two crazy but rather wonderful women who have been the core of the E.A.M. ideologists and who are in fearfully bad odour. I think they might appear as "Eleftheria" and "Maro" respectively. I hope you like and will use some of Lear's pictures.

Also that my ten replacement poems and the long Baltazar freak appease the 'magistral' eye (Anne Ridler's phrase). Rhodes is teetering like a skittle—you shall, I hope, have your 'opus' from there. It goes in this planned order

ἄγών	πάθος	ἀναγνώρισις
agon	pathos	anagnorisis
<i>The Black Book</i>	<i>The Book</i>	<i>The Book</i>
	<i>of the Dead</i>	<i>of Time</i>
the dislocation	the uniting	the acceptance
		and death

But I cannot do them all at once—they must grow on me like frogs' eggs and meanwhile I must write for practice for fun for money and for my girl friends—no?

Yours Sincerely
Larry Durrell

LETTERS TO T. S. ELIOT

[Rhodes, early Summer, 1945]

Public Information Officer

M. O. I.

B. M. A.

M. E. F. Dear TSE = Thank you for your indulgent kindness.

Was ever a troublesome and erratic soul so indebted to a chief literary guru I wonder? Believe me, I am not the ungrateful beast I must often seem. But time presses and the idiocy of having to work mounts up every day. Never mind. I have escaped from Egypt and am putting the first part of my post-war plan into action. This includes raising the dough to complete my pincer-movement divorce. To this end I have sold the labyrinth book to Tambi and am just writing an odd few thousand to finish it off. I'm afraid no opus until I can find a job somewhere in this area a little less exacting and boring than this one. Meanwhile in my usual magnesium flash way I have dug into the library here—it's full of treasures. Italy kept everyone out of here and there is masses of stuff for a book on Rhodes, in the Prospero style. If the first goes well you might consider a second on this island—nearly as lovely as Corfu it is. Wonderful stuff—pictures and stories. Last book on the Dodecanese 1928 by the Booths is a hideous little piece of botchmanship. As to the unpublished poems, hope they arrived safe, and seemed to you not a let-down. Please arrange, remove, alter, do anything whatsoever that feels to you wise. England feels so remote, and I so remote from its everyday heartbeat, that I can no longer imagine what they think and write there. Sometimes I fall upon a Horizon or a Statesman and read it casually through: it sounds so much peripheral talk about nothing. All digested learning being ferried around in the bloodstream, never finding an exit. I also sent a long poem in prose. Throw it out if you wish. The annoying thing is that it contains the most important things I've been permitted to say to date — but as a poem it is bad: I wonder if you ever feel that way about your poems? What else can I tell you? The title-poem won a 10 pound prize from some Brazilian character. That is fun. I told the PEN that they could not print it as Faber had rights. Personal Dungheap is out: I can't tell you how affectionate I feel about it, it is a summing up of our long misery in the marshes of Mareotis. It is also, I think, quite the best war-anthology and I'm sorry it didn't grace your lists this year. Never mind. I hope the poems do their stuff: you ask me whether I think myself a poet?

My dear TSE I was never one to hang my head. I am without doubt

TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

among the first three in contemporary England. You and Auden are the other two. At least if metaphysical disturbance tightly stated is the criterion. All the others are mere decorators of each others' bed-sitters. I wish this would become clear to a great number of people. Do you think it ever will? Myself I doubt greatly. But I've struck the rift all right. Hope I can hold it. 33 isn't a bad age to feel right in amongst the terrors is it?

Went to Lindos last week and thought of Cleobolus. Dazzling blinding whiteness of sand and shattered cobalt water. Yellow grapes. Clear wind stretching away all over the Mediterranean. And small black-eyed children leading goats. Can't compare with the fog and sleet; but it's so wonderful to feel large pieces of the sun wandering around inside one's cranium.

STOP PRESS. They are printing the Black Book in America with a preface by H. M. Now how about it at ten guineas, with cellophane wrapper and tongs marked TO BE SOLD TO MEMBERS OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION ONLY—as they do with poor Groddeck? Or perhaps at three guineas changing the title to *IN FINNEGAN'S WAKE*, an outline of the principal tendencies of the British nation towards sexual matters, with a preface by Shane Leslie or any other Old Etonian at present doing essential war-work in the Ministry of Food (spiritual division)? I think I could get MOI to subsidise provided we used some of their fine pictures of WRENS in the Far East. Or how about sitting on an island, fishing for sponges with a slant-eyed girl, and writing absolutely nothing? I wish someone would choose for me—I'm incapable of doing so myself ò òòòòòò

Sincerely Lawrence Durrell

M.O.I.: Ministry of Information; B.M.A.: British Military Authority; M.E.F.: Mediterranean Expeditionary Force

Rhodes, 17 November 1945

Memorandum: Poisonal

Dear T.S.E.

I feel I must write you a line to thank you for the lovely production of *Prospero*, which is nicer than I imagined possible under the present paper conditions. The *Lears* have come out beautifully, the type and paper is a pleasure to eye and finger. And the spine is so nice that I gaze at it for hours. O what a shame you are not doing the BB even in presbyterian style with dots wherever spades are called entrenching tools; or the labyrinth which I am hastily recasting nearer to the Book Society's desire. I hate having six publishers for my work—and seven

LETTERS TO T. S. ELIOT

pseudonyms: it's a bore. Now however the Obelisk man has appeared over the Horizon with an offer to print anything I write. Its like a huge weight lifted. After the LABYRINTH book I am going to spend about three years on the successor to the Black Book—the pathos to the agon; then when I'm forty-five I shall do the anagnorisis. And somewhere in between I want to do a big FUNNY book. No poems seem to be coming out me these days. The landscape has knocked me silly. You should see it. I had a note from Harold Edwards in Alexandria saying he'd seen you and you were looking tired and fed up. Why don't you get abroad for a bit: lecture in Athens. Seferiades would fix it in a twink. He is the modern Greek T. S. Eliot, your translator, and a man of real European cultivation. The cultured man you are talking about: and now old Kannelop is Prime Minister I should think they'll devote most of the state funds to printing lovely editions of Seferis' favourite poets. I don't know whether I've ever told you a rather charming anecdote about him and you. He is a poet so close to you in style and content that often we have to leave poems untranslated because they appear to have your peculiar mannerisms—self-deprecation, old-man-of-the-seaishness, and bits of swing-music put in here and there. He started from the French symbolists and claims a kinship of influence. The odd thing is he never heard of you until one day, a newly arrived junior consul at the Greek Legation, he picked up a copy of Marina and read it through. Katsimbalis his great friend has the letter Seferis wrote saying: "It is quite fantastic; I have come across an English poet influenced by me. His name is T. S. Eliot."

I asked Tambi to send you a copy of the little Landscape Book—I hope he has. Despite many weaknesses it always moves me to read because it calls up so many memories of our mad partnership in Cairo during the heat and bore of Islam. What else? O yes, TSE I read the other day your little raised eyebrows piece on Kipling: it always seemed to me that the convention which emasculated his verse (muckin for fuckin) did him great harm. I suggest the issue of a Kipling with swear-words in full: he would I am sure measure differently, and his picture of the common soldier would gain a lot.

And now just a brief word of thanks to you for your patient forgiving temperate just and moderate help in all I do; I hope to justify your niceness one day.

Sincerely

Larry Durrell

TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

[On letterhead: RECOLLECTIONS OF AN EX-BOOKSELLER By Lawrence Clark Powell, Librarian, University of California, Los Angeles, Printed to mark the anniversary of the new Bookshop of ZEITLIN & VER BRUGGE, Los Angeles, 1950]

Bravo! TSE!

I've just finished the play. There hasn't been anything so simply profound since "The Tempest" in English you'll be pleased to know and you've handled the depths with the lightness of a born Chinaman. If the Church don't burn you at the stake before you've done, however, it won't be their fault. I think there are points of dogma which are pure Taoism and Buddhism—and haven't been glimpsed by the West yet—except by people like Bruno—. But you know all this!

All I wanted to do was to say Bravo! Bravo!

Larry Durrell

Letters to Henry Miller

C/o British Institute, Hermes Street 9, Athens, Greece [ca. July 1940]

Dear Henry: thank you so much for the letter. I hadn't written because I pictured you starting off across America on foot for Taos or somewhere and saw my letter taking months. Also there seemed to be little to tell you except that Greece is still here, still intact, still beautiful, only now orchestrated by cicadas and sea-cooled. We are living just outside Athens and I am waiting to be sent to Kalamata, where I am to open a school. It is right in the southern end of the Peloponnesus, and I am promised another district quite distinct in character, very unvisited and wild. Last Sunday we went down to Mycenae again to see it by sunlight; scorching day. And the big underground cistern was full of mosquitoes—but so full that we couldn't get down it. Argolis like the green plains of Eden.

I am sharing this house with Gordon whom you know and who entertains a great admiration for your books; things look fairly uniformly black, but the British are still stubborn. The truth is that being islanders they are the last romantics, quite unable to sacrifice principle to expediency: that is why they are permanently sucked in, and continue to beam with honourable pride. "Safe my honour, safe the world" to quote a poem of mine: it remains to see whether it works out as policy. Myself I doubt like Thomas; the gentleman carries his ball and chain of self-esteem about long after all ordinary men are fighting in their underclothes. Nothing remains, at this point, except an attention

Miller had spent the last four months of 1939 with Durrell in Corfu and Athens, and then, with the war surging closer, left for the United States just after Christmas. As distance and the breakdown of postal service separated them, Miller embarked on a tour of the United States while Durrell scrambled to survive in Greece. These letters were long believed lost; then they turned up recently in a book dealer's catalogue and were purchased by Southern Illinois University. Printed here for the first time, they will form part of the new *Laurence Durrell—Henry Miller Letters*, to be published in 1988 by Faber and Faber in London and by New Directions in New York.

TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

to personal honour. But how dreadfully wasteful and boring the whole thing is; no, I don't see the new world as yet: only an age of tyranny in which we must learn to be mute or invent an oral tradition. By now you must have my last letter telling you that it is a girl; a big one full of quaint corners. So you have read *The Tempest*? Marvellous. I have been having long sessions with a young translator of it here. Don't listen to the nonsense that self-assured idiot wrote you. Nothing is "generally conceded" about S's epilogues. The *Tempest* one is certainly his. You know, you must translate always and transpose, because otherwise the true message behind *The Tempest* is apt to get lost in the purely dramatic cobwebs. See it, if you can, as an exercise in Astrology. Here is this outcast holy man in his cell on Corcyra; his retreat is really voluntary, because he is dealing with reality, his many inner selves. If you make Ariel an air sign, Caliban an earth sign, Miranda or whatever her name is Neptune you begin to see the edges of a kind of dramatic astrology peeping through. Now Prospero is rejected of the world, or has rejected it. The intrusion of the real world (the petty squabbles and human dealings of the castaways) has a real as well as dramatic value. It makes him realise that the artist who controls his Ariels and Calibans must sooner or later find his solution in the world of common people and affairs; and in the epilogue you have the clue to the whole artistic stance. The gesture of renunciation is pure wizardry; artist laying down his medicine, releasing his spirits, and putting himself AS A HUMAN BEING at their mercy. Prospero, who can control the winds by art, pleading with them to grant him favourable passage home.

It was the artist who came away to the island: it was Shakespeare who came home as a man. This last poignant verse is really a pure statement of the Hamlet-Prince theme: but with the problem resolved in Tao. "What strength I have's my own." That is to say human, fallible, subject to weather and gravity. It was the artist at last willing to become unconscious of his virtue; willing to release even his godly powers to the ebb and flow of his human and mutable life. You can look at the whole of Shakespeare's work through this final lens of the telescope, and you see the diminished figures of Hamlet and Lear and Macbeth, like in the wrong end of the telescope. In the new dimension which he found beside the Avon at Stratford the emphasis on the struggle was no longer important; it was better to smile and bless and enfold. So that the epilogue is a little benediction on a world which he at last allowed to *wound him to the quick*; in *Hamlet* and *Lear* he had been fighting against the death, like neurotic fighting, with the cold wheels of his will-power. In *The Tempest* he finds that the wound itself is sweet, and that by giving

LETTERS TO HENRY MILLER

up only can he continue his life. So Prospero falls upon his sword, blessing; not cringing like Hamlet or Macbeth. There is something in this for us I feel, now, this moment; a kind of lesson teaching us that the world counts apart from us, and that there is no positive solution to pain but to suffer and adore—and of course smile; *The Tempest* is like one long quiet smile. May we all renounce with the same grace and happiness. After Prospero you must turn up a text of Shakespeare's will and see how normally and calmly the final surrender was carried out; there is not a trace of the graven idol. I often think that Prospero was looking over his shoulder when he put his name to that human formula. We lesser people would have written a will in verse.

Anyway that is what I make of it, though it is written in great haste and reads rather muddled; my letter I mean, not the play. Now Henry, if you want to find another cryptic thing, look up Shakespeare's Phoenix and Turtle. Buried in this polished ivory verse there is the most marvellous controlled pain about a woman; I think young Prospero wrote it. It might solace you in your grand chagrin. It feels contemporary with *The Tempest*, though it couldn't have been I suppose.

I hope you won't forget to look at Herbert List's photos when they arrive in New York; you will [see?] Greece again I promise you; no tricks; pure form and value like the cosmological eye at work.¹

Your manuscript has arrived and is being eagerly devoured; I haven't had a moment with it as yet.² Everyone is so thrilled to be themselves etched out in print. I remember some excerpts you sent containing violences against the dear old British Empire of which I am now a paid servant. Really, Henry, you don't say if you are cutting them out from tact or because they don't seem good any longer. I liked the Englishman not being as good as the dirt between the Greek's toes; but thought that perhaps you should have said this specially of the idiots you met in Greece. Not in general perhaps; because it is not untrue so much as unsubtle. You must read *Forever Ulysses* by a Greek called C. P. RODOCANACHI, Viking Press. In this you will find the last five or six pages absolutely crammed with the most marvellous nationalistic generalisations by a poor Greek: anent English French and Italians. It is brilliant. I'm sure you will enjoy this telescoped life of Zaharof and Averof. It's in English. Try and get it. It shows the long-nosed triumphant adaptable Greek conquering the world—the modern world.

O and you said some hard things against Byron which I think you might retract if you read the poor man's letters. Also Gordon has got a little story which I have told him to send you about a man he met in the

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American Express who wanted to be buried in the sacred soil of Greece; an American this time. A touching little story.

I think my job is more or less in the bag so you can let fly again by post with all the blue sedition you want.

Needless to say I am not writing a line. I can't. It's marvellous that you are keeping up to [the] line. I feel there's a new breath of revelation impending which will give me a subject more at peace with the heart, and less rending to the brain.

Am in the middle of *Moby Dick*; the strangest book ever written in America I think. Metaphysics side by side with frantic action: like a cowboy film with a running commentary prepared from the deeper parts of Augustine's confessions. Really something quite *new*. Have you read it. It's all about the great whale.

My love to Anaïs, unswerving as ever, and to your daughter and to your publishers and patrons. And thank you so much for the dough. I will start paying it back in a couple of months or so. In the meantime bless you all, enjoy things. We are in a little oasis here of calm and form. Like Archimedes inside his problem while the infantry stormed the walls.

Love from us all,

larry
nancy
berengaria penelope nausicaa
durrell

¹ "The Cosmological Eye" is the title of Miller's essay about his painter friend Hans Reichel, whose works are notable for their "pure form and value," but elsewhere Durrell has compared List to the photographer Brassai, and this reference seems possible here.

² Miller sent Durrell the manuscript of *The Colossus of Maroussi*, which features many of their Greek friends.

INSTITUTE OF ENGLISH STUDIES

[Kalamata, before 13 February 1941]

henry dear: I suppose you are on your travels because George sent you a telegram when war broke out and had no reply: indeed the cable was returned marked "address unknown." So far we have [been] living all the time here in the suspense between air-raids; so far no bombs, but

LETTERS TO HENRY MILLER

two days ago an Italian plane nearly flew into the dining-room window. It was a strange sensation to see this graceful grey thing sliding out of the sky over the harbour. There was a good deal of shooting from the only machine gun here, and it turned slowly and buzzed over the mountain in the direction of Crete. I am not writing needless to say: too much noise in the world to hear one's own voice. The old terra firma of the last year in neutral Athens which was such a musical comedy of spies and plots ended really with the death of Max—on the field of battle. To die in a Balkan cabaret surrounded by blondes! Max is a great loss: goodness and innocence were so deeply fused in him that from the surface he seemed vapid. There is a whole book about him and us and Athens—a kind of cell of quiet and suspense among the statues, which I must write one day. Stephan is off with the Infantry, Tonio with a destroyer, and the Colossus is learning anti-aircraft drill! I have sent up my name for the R.A.F. and am waiting to see what the Council have to say about it. Athens is blacked out and all the familiar faces missing from behind bars and kiosks and flower-shops. Sad world! but the Greeks are even more magnificent in war than in peace. Their humour! And they are clean fighters by tradition—scorn to burn villages, take hostages, or mutilate the enemy. You have probably read of the appearance of the Virgin of Tinos on the Albanian front; there is one other anecdote—less cheering. An advancing company of Greeks came to a silent valley, evacuated by the enemy. In the silence they heard a strange voice crying out in Greek. A captured *Euzone* had been hung up in a tree by his arms. He was complete in ballet skirt and pom-pom shoes, only the enemy had dug his eyes out and left him there to greet the advancing troops. Nice isn't it?

I sent my poems to Anaïs at the address she gave; perhaps she could let the Viking see them. Some are wonderful.

“Well, of my 3 score years and ten
20 will not come again.”

And so my good Henry, good evening to you. I feel like Sir Tophas, “an hundred hundred years old.”

Love to USA.

Larry

Post Script Feb 13/1941

Before I post this let me add a temporary valediction, because it looks as if the Bulgars are coming and the Turks going. We are all in a very

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good heart—no longer bothered much about dying or living or starving. Truly, the whole drama has gone into another dimension in which one is simply not *interested* in the deepest sense. But blessings upon your head for your kindness and support. Ironically enough yesterday afternoon the cloud lifted and I saw the **WHOLE BOOK OF THE DEAD** lying below me like a forbidden superb city. I am ready to begin it now: it's a marvellous conception and complete—and I hope to live to complete it in your honour and Anaïs'—a monument to Villa Seurat and the dead cosmological past: the future is clear—so clear and calm that we cannot fail to reach it. In the meantime, with Sir Thopas "Love is a lord of misrule and keepeth Christmas in my corpse."

INSTITUTE OF ENGLISH STUDIES,
Kalamata, Greece, March 13/1941

Dear Henry: Every time I start a letter to you some new quirk happens in the situation and I stop it, saying: "This'll never get through." Now, of course, we are sitting on the crater, expecting Yugoslavia to cave in any day, and of course the mails to crumple up. However, I am going through with this letter—if only to tell you that we are all well, and that so far we have not been bombed: one or two distant puffs and roars is all I have seen of the greater world war as yet, though plenty of planes come over and startle the life out of the townsfolk. Now spring is coming this valley is getting beautiful and serene, encircled by big snow caps, and raving with oranges. Last Sunday we walked up the dizziest mountain path to the snowline of our range, and saw the great white snout of Taïgetos in the valley beyond. Greece is so local and I know the Peloponnesus so well that I could shut my eyes and see it laid out like a relief-map—Sparta under the wing of Mistra, Tripolis in the great Pear-Campus, Argos and Nauplia thawing slowly in the haze with the first anemones and asphodels, and Epidaurus like some afterthought—an appendix to the old world with all the revisions and false starts and erasures put in their place in one superb act of thought. I still haven't had time to go there and write my dream diary: and it looks as if I'll have to wait now for some time. Last month all the schools closed and I sent up my name for the Air Force, but was told that we are being kept on temporarily by the Council. So in the interval I walk about like a free man and sniff the wind and relive my past incarnations as a goat, a tree,

LETTERS TO HENRY MILLER

and a centaur. I have no more feelings about anything these days: which makes it impossible to write anything except bad poems.

The Greeks are in fine fettle: in the war they have discovered themselves and walk about in a dream: for the first time in her modern history there has emerged a public will—not a dissenting voice anywhere: so that they see themselves, darkly, like through a smoked glass and feel a great new form and shape descend upon them, without knowing what it is. Of course they are boasting and joyful.

I went up to Athens a while ago and found big changes: all blacked out and grim, with planes patrolling over the statues. I am so happy that England and Greece are in this together; with all their faults they both stand for something great. It is a cosmic trio really—Greece, China, England. We are the young one by comparison, and our great national Principle is still unstated and unrealised. I would like to do this in a book some time, because it should be done before we grow out of our young imperialist stage into the deep and shining dynastic age. Indeed unless the ENGLISH PRINCIPLE is stated we cannot grow into a deeper recognition of ourselves. Over there you can have no idea how moving and awakening is the effort and the love expended by the ordinary people caught in this great rat-trap of war; in England the children putting posies of wild-flowers on the graves of the German airmen who have smashed their towns to powder. In Greece the shop-girls who have been hastily enlisted as nurses weeping over two poor Italians who had to have their legs amputated for frost-bite; the beggars running beside the columns of prisoners giving them bits of bread or an orange—with that gay heart-breaking smile of generosity which is seen nowhere except in the faces of the very poor in Greece: the marvellous chivalry of the Greek air force—equal to anything in our own—who scorn to shoot down parachutists. And on the other side the lying crawling meanness of the Italians who bombed Larissa during the earthquake: who bomb villages from 30,000 feet for fear of the single defending machine gun as at Pylos: and who run before the wretchedly clad, poorly fed *Euzones* in their scarlet shoes. One thing is certain, that these rats are not the masters of Europe, and never can be: and of course, as we prophesied at the beginning of the war the arch-rat is France. You will see her declare for Germany before long: all she wants is an excuse.

All this, of course, has no connection with us in the ultimate sense: only as T. E. Lawrence said once, "There are times when right living is cried down, and then only the sword can preach." I see that USA is being more and more rapidly implicated in the struggle.

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I get an occasional line from Seferiades who is working like hell: Katsimbalis is the most impressive officer in Greece I hear: and the young are surging forward. Stephan the bearded magician of Mykonos is up in the line. Daperis and Xipollitos too. I feel like a sort of school-teaching Abelard—"her privates we" if you see the connection. In the meantime the child has grown enormously, has eight teeth, a vocabulary of two words, and a yell like a hungry starling. I haven't succeeded in teaching her to say "Uncle Henry" yet.

No news from you for a long time: I'm sure you are well, hope you are happy, and cannot believe that you have not written a dozen books since you landed. Love to Anaïs and Betty and Eduardo and Hugo and all whom it may concern; Nancy sends her love and says WHY don't you write and tell us about your daughter? Did you meet? Is she a beauty? Is she a writer? and so on.

I send you a leaf from a wild rose of Messenia picked beside the untamed hero-loving gulf: and salute you in the name of Aphrodite the foam-born. love.

larry

**Entretien avec
Lawrence Durrell**

PAR CLAUDINE BRELET

verso

**Interview with
Lawrence Durrell**

BY CLAUDINE BRELET

recto

Entretien avec Lawrence Durrell

PAR CLAUDINE BRELET

Claudine Brelet: Je suis certaine que nos auditeurs aimeraient connaître votre signe astrologique. . . .

Lawrence Durrell: Je suis né "Poissons." Il paraît que les Poissons ne se connaissent pas du tout. J'aime toutes sortes d'exagérations. Alors, si je vous disais que je suis né aux Indes, ça a l'air d'être tout provisoire.

Brelet: Je crois que c'était aux pieds des Himalayas . . .

Durrell: Pas exactement. C'est une invention de Henry Miller. Mais j'aime bien l'idée. Effectivement, je suis né dans les provinces centrales, à Jullundur, le 27 février 1912. J'ai resté jusque à 12 ans. Mon père était ingénieur. Il faisait des chemins de fer. A ce moment, il y avait très peu de chemins de fer. Il était un pionnier. Nous l'avons suivi toujours dans les tentes, un peu comme les gitans et toujours dans la nature. La vraie nature, c'est-à-dire la jungle avec toutes les responsabilités que les humains ont là.

Brelet: Etait-ce vraiment comme la jungle de Kipling? de Kim?

Durrell: Oui, effectivement. On a vécu des pages de Kipling dans ce cadre-là. Avec tous les . . ., je souligne, tous les dangers. Quand on est très jeune, c'est bien d'avoir la responsabilité d'attendre la visite d'un serpent très désagréable, comme un cobra, ou d'un scorpion . . . ou même de tuer quelque chose comme un petit léopard qui arrive dans le camp pendant la nuit. Tout cela contrastait totalement avec la vie que j'ai menée après en Angleterre—une vie qui était assez . . . périmee . . .

Brelet: Etait-ce encore l'Angleterre victorienne à ce moment-là?

Interview with Lawrence Durrell

BY CLAUDINE BRELET

Claudine Brelet: I am sure that many people would like to know your astrological sign. . . .

Lawrence Durrell: I am a Pisces. Pisces people are supposed not to know themselves . . . but I enjoy all sorts of exaggerations. Thus, if I tell you that I was born in India, it gives the impression of being invented.

Brelet: As far as I know, you were born at the foot of the Himalayas . . .

Durrell: Not exactly. That was invented by Henry Miller. But I do like the idea. Actually, I was born in the central province of Jullundur on the 27th February of 1912. I stayed in India until I was 12 years old. My father was an engineer. He built railways. At that time, there were very few of them! My father was a pioneer. We used to follow him all the time, living under tents like gypsies, always in nature, in the most genuine nature—namely the jungle with all the responsibilities that a jungle implies for human beings to face there.

Brelet: Was it really like Kipling's jungle? Like Kim's?

Durrell: Yes indeed. We were actually living pages of Kipling there. With all . . . I underline it, with all the dangers. When one is very young, it is good to have the responsibility of being ready to face the visit of a snake as unpleasant as a cobra, or of a scorpion . . . or even to kill something like a small leopard that visits the camp at night. It was a total contrast with the kind of life that I experienced later on in England. . . . In England, the lifestyle was rather . . . old-fashioned, rather . . .

Brelet: Was it still Victoria's England, at that time?

This interview was conducted in French in Sommières, Fall 1971, for the Broadcasting Station "Europe 1," Michel Lancelot's program "Campus."

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Durrell: Tout à fait, rien n'avait beaucoup changé depuis le temps de Dickens—exceptées les conditions matérielles qui étaient beaucoup mieux. Ce n'était pas si sauvage! Mais l'attitude puritaine restait plus ou moins la même. Et nos instituteurs qui avaient alors 50 ou 60 ans, avaient vécu la période de Dickens eux-mêmes dans leur enfance.

Brelet: Un jour, vous m'avez raconté que votre école se trouvait à l'emplacement-même du théâtre de Shakespeare. Est-ce vrai?

Durrell: Oui. En arrivant en Angleterre, je n'ai pas trouvé immédiatement une place dans une Public School. Alors j'ai dû passer six ou huit mois dans une Grammar School, fondée par Elisabeth I, qui se situait à l'emplacement du théâtre de Shakespeare. C'était un coin très romantique à Londres, à côté de Tower Bridge et de la cathédrale de Southwark. C'est là que je suis tombé amoureux de cette période élisabéthaine, parce que c'était autour de moi. Dans cette petite école, St Olave's Grammar School, le play-ground était exactement à l'emplacement du théâtre de Shakespeare.

A midi, quand nous étions lâchés pour trois-quart d'heure, je prenais mon lunch dans Southwark Cathedral. Pas mal d'écrivains sont enterrés là-bas. On peut même y voir la tombe d'un frère de Shakespeare, Edmund Shakespeare, dont on ne connaît absolument rien—excepté son nom gravé sur une plaque.

Brelet: Quand avez-vous arrêté vos études, que s'est-il passé?

Durrell: J'avais environ 17 ans. J'étais complexé. J'ai compris des années après, mille ans après, pourquoi. Je n'avais pas envie d'aller en Angleterre parce que mon père le voulait, mais de rester en Inde, comme ma mère le désirait.

Brelet: Quand avez-vous commencé à voyager?

Durrell: Grâce à la dernière année où j'ai raté Cambridge, pour la troisième fois. Je suis allé sur le Continent pour faire ce qu'on appelait des "reading-parties." C'est comme ça que je suis tombé à Paris et que j'ai connu la Suisse pour la première fois. C'était le commencement de mes voyages parce que, naturellement, j'ai de nouveau raté Cambridge puis j'ai filé!

Brelet: Votre premier séjour à Paris, comment s'est-il passé?

INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE DURRELL

Durrell: Indeed, nothing had much changed since Dickens except that, materially, the lifestyle was much better. It was not so rugged! But the puritan attitude was more or less the same. In addition, our schoolmasters who were then 50 or 60 years old had themselves been living in the Dickens era during their childhood.

Brelet: Once, you told me that your first school in England was at the very place where Shakespeare had his theatre. Do I remember correctly?

Durrell: Yes. When I arrived in England at the age of seven, I had to wait in London for 6 or 8 months, until there was a place for me in a Public School. So, I was sent to a Grammar School founded by Elizabeth I. It had been built exactly on the site of Shakespeare's theatre. It was a very romantic part of London, near Tower Bridge and Southwark Cathedral. And that is where I fell in love with the Elizabethan period, because it was all around me. In this small school, St. Olave's Grammar School, our play-ground was exactly situated on the theatre site.

Almost every day, during our break at twelve, I used to take my lunch with me, to Southwark Cathedral. A number of writers are buried there. One can even see the grave of Edmund Shakespeare, one of Shakespeare's brothers. Nobody knows anything about him—except for his name carved on the stone.

Brelet: When you stopped your studies, what happened?

Durrell: I was about 17 years old. I had complexes. I understood why years, a thousand years, later: I had not desired to go to England as my father wanted, but to stay in India, as my mother wished.

Brelet: When did you begin your travels?

Durrell: It was thanks to my failure, for the third time, to make Cambridge. I went to "the Continent" during the summer holidays for what were called "reading-parties." This is how I landed in Paris and got acquainted with Switzerland for the first time. This was the beginning of my travels because, naturally, when I missed Cambridge again, I escaped!

Brelet: How was your first trip to Paris?

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Durrell: Absolument fascinant. J'ai découvert que les Français ne connaissaient pas très bien le français! J'ai acheté mon premier bouquin en français: *Les Chants de Maldoror*, par Isidore Ducasse, édité par Philippe Soupault, un poète français (qui continue d'écrire mais m'a dit qu'il refuse de publier maintenant!). Ce bouquin m'a fasciné. C'était une porte qui s'ouvrait sur Rimbaud, les Symbolistes, etc . . . (un monde absolument inconnu pour moi) avec, finalement, Dada, Andre Breton, Tristan Tzara et bien d'autres.

Brelet: Vous les avez rencontrés?

Durrell: Non, pas personnellement. J'avais 19 ans. J'étais inconnu. Je ne connaissais qu'un vieux professeur de français qui habitait dans une banlieue de Paris. . . .

Brelet: Que représentait pour vous *Les Chants de Maldoror*?

Durrell: Quelque chose de très romantique qui correspondait absolument avec les sentiments d'un jeune homme de 21 ans qui est très romantique. Et aussi, vous savez, Isidore Ducasse a fait le vrai coup poétique: il est mort poitrinaire. C'était absolument nécessaire à ce moment-là, pour un poète, d'avoir gravé sur sa tombe: "Ci-git un poitrinaire, priez pour lui." Aussi, grand mystère, on ne savait pas où il habitait. Il y a très peu de détails sur cette vie étrange qu'il a commencée à Montevideo, je crois, ou à Tahiti comme Gauguin. Enfin, tout était très bien en place, comme avec Gérard de Nerval. C'était romantique. Je crois qu'il y a toujours un côté en moi qui reste un peu orienté vers les romantiques.

Brelet: De Paris, où êtes-vous allé?

Durrell: En Italie, un petit peu. Puis je suis tombé sur la Grèce. Comme tous les jeunes, naturellement, on est toujours fauché. Si on reçoit des sous, on les dépense. . . . J'ai trouvé qu'en Grèce, c'était possible de vivre vraiment sans dépenser du tout. Et j'ai vécu les deux premières années en pêcheur, plus ou moins, à Corfou. Quand la guerre a éclaté, comme je parlais alors le grec, j'étais utile pour l'ambassade à Athènes. Alors, j'étais "infiltré" dans le service diplomatique.

Brelet: Est-ce pendant ce premier séjour à Corfou que vous avez fait venir votre mère et vos frères, dont Gerald qui a fondé ce zoo à Jersey?

INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE DURRELL

Durrell: Fascinating indeed. I discovered that French people did not know French very well! I bought my first book in French: *Les Chants de Maldoror*, by Isidore Ducasse, published by Philippe Soupault—a French poet (who is still writing but he told me, the other day, that he refuses to be published!). The door was opened to Rimbaud, the Symbolists, etc. (a world totally unknown to me), with, eventually, Dada, Andre Breton, Tristan Tzara and many others.

Brelet: Did you meet them?

Durrell: Not personally. I was only 19 years old then. I was unknown and knew nobody except an old French teacher who was living in the outskirts of Paris. . . .

Brelet: What did *Les Chants de Maldoror* represent to you then?

Durrell: Something very romantic, that was totally attuned to the feelings of a 21-year-old boy who was extremely romantic. In addition, you may remember that Isidore Ducasse, alias the Comte de Lautréamont, made the true poetical *coup*: he died of consumption. It was absolutely necessary for a poet at that time to have on his grave: "Here lies a consumptive. Pray for him." There was also a great mystery about him: nobody knew exactly where he was living. There are a very few details about the strange life he undertook to live first in Montevideo, I believe, or perhaps in Tahiti like Gauguin. In short, everything fell into place, as it also did for Gérard de Nerval. It was romantic. I think there is still something in me a little oriented toward the Romantics.

Brelet: From Paris, where did you go?

Durrell: To Italy, for a short period of time. Then, I happened upon Greece. Like all youth, naturally, I was always penniless. Whenever I had money, it was spent immediately. . . . I discovered that, in Greece, it was possible to live without spending a single penny. So, I lived more or less like a fisherman in Corfu, during the first two years. When the Second World War was declared, since I spoke Greek at that time, I could be useful to the British Embassy in Athens. Thus, I infiltrated the diplomatic service!

Brelet: Was it during this first stay in Corfu that you asked your mother and your brothers to join you there—including Gerald, who later founded the zoo in Jersey?

TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

Durrell: Ses livres sont excellents. Mais il est un peu brutal avec son frère—moi! En réalité, je ne vivais pas avec eux. J'étais marié et vivais avec ma femme assez loin de là. La plupart des anecdotes sont maniées à l'irlandaise: il y a un petit fond de vérité et beaucoup d'exagération. Ça, c'est le genre de galéjade irlandaise.

Brelet: Etes-vous fier d'être irlandais?

Durrell: Oui! à cause de cette tradition littéraire. Presque tous les bons écrivains en Angleterre sont des irlandais.

Brelet: On dit que les irlandais sont très spirituels, dans tous les sens du terme en français. . . . Faites-vous une différence entre la religion et la métaphysique?

Durrell: S'il fallait choisir une religion, le Bouddhisme me satisfait beaucoup plus que les autres.

Brelet: Pour quelles raisons?

Durrell: D'abord, c'est clair. Ce n'est pas obscur. C'est un peu comme un délai sans comptabilité. Si vous suivez ce chemin, vous arrivez à un résultat. La seule religion européenne qui était à la fois aussi rigide que le Marxisme et aussi mystique que le Bouddhisme, c'était l'Epicurisme. L'Epicurisme faisait de l'univers un système qui avait une logique aussi forte et rationnelle que le matérialisme marxiste. Et, de l'autre côté, il laissait aller le côté métaphysique. Pendant trois cents ans, la lutte entre les Chrétiens et les Epicuriens était tellement intense qu'on a cru que c'était les Chrétiens qui seraient oblitérés. Mais au contraire, ce fut Epicurus. C'est un grand malheur pour nous. C'est le plus grand malheur philosophique! Même ses livres sont difficiles à obtenir. Un jour, j'en ai obtenu un. Quand je le montre à des jeunes, ils sont absolument ravis parce que ça satisfait à la fois leurs préoccupations technologiques et matérielles, et c'est un feu vert pour le côté religieux.

Brelet: Quelle est votre définition de l'Epicurisme?

Durrell: Cette philosophie est basée sur la sincérité, l'honnêteté, l'engagement . . . peut-être dans le sens de Rousseau et de Denis de Rougemont.

Brelet: Est-ce à cause de l'Epicurisme que vous aimez tant la Grèce? Comment était-ce avant guerre, lorsque vous vous y êtes installé?

INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE DURRELL

Durrell: His books are excellent. But, he is a bit churlish with his brother—me! As a matter of fact, I was not exactly living with them. I was married and was living with my wife rather far from them. Most of the anecdotes he tells are built up in the Irish way! There is a little truth and a great deal of exaggeration. This is the usual style of Irish jokes.

Brelet: Are you proud to be Irish?

Durrell: Yes! Because of their tradition in literature. You know, nearly all the good writers in England are Irish.

Brelet: Irish people are known to be very spiritual Do you see a difference between religion and metaphysics?

Durrell: If I had to choose a religion, Buddhism would satisfy me more than the others.

Brelet: For what reasons?

Durrell: First of all, it is clear. It is not obscure. It is a little like a reprieve without accountability: if you follow this path, you can get some results. Epicureanism was the only European religion that was as rigid as Marxism and as mystical as Buddhism. Epicureanism made the universe into a system that had a logic as powerful and rational as Marxist materialism but which gave, on the other hand, freedom to the metaphysical side. For three centuries there was such an intense struggle between Christians and Epicureans that one would have thought that it would be the Christians who would be eliminated. But on the contrary, it was Epicurus. It is the greatest misfortune philosophically! Now, even Epicurus' books are difficult to find. Finally, I found one and lent it to some youngsters. They got totally enthusiastic about his philosophy because it satisfied all at once technological and materialistic preoccupations and was a green light for the religious side.

Brelet: What is your definition of Epicureanism?

Durrell: This philosophy is based on sincerity, honesty, engagement . . . perhaps as social involvement and responsibility were defined, centuries later, by Rousseau and, today, by Denis de Rougemont.

Brelet: Is Epicureanism one of the reasons why you are so fond of Greece? How was it before the war, when you were settled there?

TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

Durrell: Avant guerre, d'abord, le tourisme n'existait presque pas en Grèce. Vous savez, le DDT n'était pas inventé! Les monastères grecs, les maisons, partout, les punaises et les mouches étaient tellement pénibles . . . il fallait tout faire à pied, ou avec des mulets. . . . La plupart des résidents anglais, cinq ou six peut-être, étaient des archéologues. Au commencement de la guerre, il y avait ce petit nombre de gens qui parlaient le grec couramment pour aider les Anglais. Ainsi, après un an de travail à l'Ambassade, j'ai fait l'attaché de presse et j'ai donné des conférences. Puis nous étions chassés par les Allemands en Crète. Et de Crète en Egypte. C'est comme ça que j'ai commencé une carrière diplomatique qui a duré quinze ans.

Brelet: Avez-vous été "hellenisé" par votre vie en Grèce?

Durrell: J'ai fait seulement deux ans de grec ancien en Angleterre. Je savais l'alphabet et je pouvais à peine lire le grec ancien. Puis j'ai appris le grec moderne. La Grèce est tellement étrange. . . . Ou bien c'est la lumière . . . ou bien c'est l'atmosphère . . . ou bien c'est l'accueil des Grecs eux-mêmes. C'est un genre de chose qui n'est pas truqué! . . . Je ne connais pas un livre qui est arrivé à donner cette sensation d'élation et de joie. Même maintenant quand je vais en Grèce, je redeviens comme à 30 ans. C'est extraordinaire mais je ne sais pas ce que c'est.

Brelet: Est-ce aussi comme cette joie de vivre qu'on retrouve dans les textes anciens, comme *Ulysse*?

Durrell: Quand je suis arrivé à Corfou, j'ai loué une maison très loin dans le nord. Un pêcheur me donnait le soir des leçons en grec. Un jour, il me dit: "Regarde ce livre, c'est à mes filles." Par des illustrations, j'ai reconnu que c'était Homère. Il me dit: "Je vais te raconter l'histoire. Elle est merveilleuse!" Et cet homme, presque illettré, m'a raconté les aventures d'Ulysse comme une histoire d'aujourd'hui. Il croyait que le bouquin avait été écrit il y a quelques années par un génie à Athènes, parce que c'était en grec moderne et adapté pour les enfants. La force de l'histoire est telle, même décortiquée. . . .

Brelet: C'est presque ce que vous avez fait en écrivant votre propre *Ulysse*—votre comédie musicale *Ulysses, Come Back*.

Durrell: Oh! là là . . .

Brelet: Que vouliez-vous dire, avec ce titre?

INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE DURRELL

Durrell: Before the war, there was almost no tourism at all in Greece. Of course, DDT was not yet invented! In Greek monasteries, houses, everywhere, bedbugs and flies were very troublesome . . . there were no other means of travel than by foot or on the back of mules. . . . Almost all British residents were archaeologists. At the beginning of the war, they were just about the only people who could speak Greek fluently enough to help the British authorities. Thus, after one year of work at the Embassy, I became their press attaché and gave some lectures. Then, we were pushed to Crete by the Germans, and from there to Egypt. This was the way my fifteen years' career as a diplomat began.

Brelet: Have you been "Hellenized" by your life in Greece?

Durrell: I had had only two years of ancient Greek in England. I knew the alphabet and could read a little ancient Greek. Then, I learned modern Greek. Greece is so strange. . . . It may be the light, or the air, or the welcome the Greeks give you . . . I do not know precisely what makes its charm. There is something genuine, but hard to describe precisely. I don't know a single book that has succeeded in catching this feeling of elation and joy! Even now, when I go back to Greece, I feel renewed—like being 30 years old. It is extraordinary, but I don't know just what it is.

Brelet: Would you compare it to the *joie de vivre* that one recognizes in ancient texts like the *Odyssey*, for example?

Durrell: Well, when I arrived in Corfu, I rented a house in the far north of the island. A fisherman gave me Greek lessons in the evenings. One day he said to me: "Look at this book. It belongs to my daughters." From its pictures, I recognized it as Homer. He said: "I will tell you the story. It is a wonderful one!" And this man, nearly illiterate, told me the adventures of Ulysses, as if the ancient hero were a modern character. He thought that the book had been written by a genius in Athens only a few years before, because it was in modern Greek, and adapted for children. The power of the story was such, even stripped of its husk of poetical language. . . .

Brelet: This is almost what you did yourself in writing your own *Odyssey*, your musical, *Ulysses, Come Back*.

Durrell: Oh! la, la . . .

Brelet: What did you mean exactly by such a title?

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Durrell: C'est: "Salaud, rentre à la maison!" C'était pour m'amuser. Pendant les événements de mai 1968 à Paris, j'étais seul ici pendant trois semaines. Il n'y avait absolument rien à faire. J'avais terminé un bouquin et il me semblait amusant de faire ce genre de chose. C'est très dépassé... un peu comme *No, No, Nanette*...

Brelet: C'est ce qui fait son charme! Mais dans votre *Ulysse*, il y a trois femmes. Elles ont le même visage. N'est-ce pas un peu votre propre quête, avec les femmes... vous vous êtes marié plusieurs fois! Là, sur votre cheminée, il y a la photo d'une bonne douzaine de femmes. Que représente pour vous la femme?

Durrell: La drogue!

Brelet: Comment ça, la drogue?

Durrell: Je plaisantais. On ne peut pas répondre à ce genre de question. Ou peut-être avec des mots de Groddeck. Il dit quelque part dans un de ses bouquins que la femme aime la personnalité de l'homme, mais l'homme aime la nature de la femme.

Brelet: Est-ce que vous cherchiez le même visage à travers toutes vos femmes?

Durrell: Je ne sais pas. Peut-être des mères... Je suis un peu orphelin dans ce sens-là. Mais... un écrivain pèse très lourd sur la vie d'une femme parce que, d'un côté, il est très fort dans le domaine des idées mais très faible dans le domaine matériel. C'est injuste ce qu'il fait. Ce qu'il lui faut, c'est une garde-malade pour l'amour de l'art!

Brelet: On garde peut-être un côté adolescent, comme vous-même?

Durrell: Oui, je crois que ça, c'est essentiel... Je me rappelle une entrevue avec Jean Giono. Il a insisté deux ou trois fois en disant que j'ai toujours gardé le côté nigaud! Henry Miller est du même genre... et il adore Giono!

Brelet: Est-ce important de garder un côté adolescent quand on est écrivain, quand on est un artiste?

Durrell: Je crois qu'il faut être un genre d'estropié mental pour y arriver.

Brelet: Dans quel sens?

INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE DURRELL

Durrell: I meant: "Sloven, come back home!" I wrote it to enjoy myself. While the events of May 1968 were unfolding in Paris, I stayed alone here, in Sommières, for three weeks. There was absolutely nothing to do. All activities were paralyzed in France. I had just finished writing a book, and I wanted to create some fun for myself by doing that kind of thing. Don't you think its music is a little bit outdated . . . something like *No, No, Nanette*?

Brelet: This is what gives it its charm! In your *Ulysses*, there are three women. They all have the same face. Isn't it in some way your own quest with women . . . you've been married several times! Here, on the mantel-piece of your chimney, there are photos of at least a good dozen women. What does woman represent to you?

Durrell: Addiction!

Brelet: What do you mean?

Durrell: I was joking. It is impossible to answer such a question. Unless perhaps in the words of Groddeck. Somewhere, in one of his books, he wrote that woman loves the personality of man, while man loves the nature of woman.

Brelet: Were you looking for the "same face" through all your women?

Durrell: I don't know. Perhaps, I was looking for a mother . . . In this sense, I feel a little bit like an orphan. But, a writer is a burden in a woman's life, because, while a writer is very strong in the realm of ideas, he remains very weak when it comes to the practical realities of life. Thus a writer is a bit wrong, a bit twisted. He needs someone who would be a nurse for the love of art!

Brelet: A writer is an eternal adolescent, like you yourself?

Durrell: Yes, I believe it is essential. . . . I remember that when I met Jean Giono, he insisted two or three times that I had remained a nipper. Henry Miller belongs to the same kind . . . and he adores Giono!

Brelet: Is it important to keep the adolescent alive within when one is a writer or, generally, an artist?

Durrell: I think that one has to be mentally crippled in order to be able to write.

Brelet: In what sense?

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Durrell: Je veux dire qu'il faut des obstacles absolument impossibles, des difficultés, souvent physiques dans le genre de Byron, ou la santé de Proust, ou de Leopardi. Dans le cas d'Henry, des névroses vraiment très sévères qu'il a surmontées successivement en les expulsant, comme on expulse le démon.

Brelet: Pensez-vous que l'art soit une sorte d'exorcisme?

Durrell: Oui. C'est une forme de purge. Et l'acte de se purger publiquement. . . . Une oeuvre d'art permet au lecteur ou à la lectrice de faire le même truc pour soi-même.

Brelet: Avez-vous écrit votre premier livre, *Le Carnet noir*, pour vous-même ou en pensant à un public précis?

Durrell: A ce moment-là, c'était impossible de publier ce genre de bouquin car il y avait trois fois le mot "merde!" C'était impossible! Je l'ai écrit pour moi-même, comme un genre de journal.

Brelet: Quand on est un écrivain connu, quand on s'appelle Lawrence Durrell, est-ce qu'on écrit d'abord pour soi ou en pensant au lecteur?

Durrell: Je ne sais pas. . . . Est-ce qu'on joue du piano uniquement pour soi-même? Oui, quelquefois, quand la maison est vide, quelquefois on joue pour se faire entendre. Je ne crois pas que ce soit possible d'être très exact. . . . Mais écrire, c'est dangereux. C'est comme jouer avec de la dynamite. On remue tous les problèmes infantiles dans le sens freudien. . . . Oh! non, vraiment, ce n'est pas gai!

Brelet: Si vous deviez changer de métier, que feriez-vous?

Durrell: De la menuiserie!

Brelet: Vous aimeriez mourir de quelle façon?

Durrell: D'amour!

INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE DURRELL

Durrell: I mean that one needs impossible hindrances, difficulties, often physical as in the case of Byron, or in health as with Proust or Leopardi. In Henry Miller's case, there were very severe neuroses that he successively overcame by expelling them as one expels a demon.

Brelet: Do you believe that art is, in a way, some kind of exorcism?

Durrell: Indeed! It is a form of cleansing. It is an act of public purgation. And a work of art allows the reader to do the same for him or herself.

Brelet: Did you write your first book, *The Black Book*, for yourself or thinking of a specific public?

Durrell: At that time, it was impossible to publish such a book, because the word "shit" appeared three times in it! It was impossible! I wrote it for myself, like a kind of journal.

Brelet: When a writer is famous, as Lawrence Durrell is now, does one still write for oneself or to please the reader?

Durrell: I don't know. . . . Does one play the piano only for oneself? Yes, I believe so, sometimes. When the house is empty, then one plays to have the feeling of being heard! I cannot be precise about that. . . . But writing is dangerous. It is like playing with dynamite. All the troubles from one's childhood are surfacing, in the Freudian sense. . . . Oh! really, it is not pleasant at all!

Brelet: If you were to change your profession, what would you do?

Durrell: Carpentry!

Brelet: How would you prefer to die?

Durrell: Of love!

The Lonely Roads: Notes for an Unwritten Book

BY MARGARET MCCALL

Footsteps. Whistling. Singing: "Quand Madelon." Title. Wide shot Garrigues countryside. Title fades. Zoom in to see tramp standing in front of stone "bourri." Tramp stoops to pick up bottle of wine. He puts bottle and bread in bag, picks up stick and exits. Empty road. Diane Deriaz comes into view, walks down road towards camera. Diane over rooftop as she approaches. Pan R. to see her come through door, up steps as Durrell comes from house to greet her. Diane and Durrell embrace.

DURRELL (Voice Over):

Oh Freedom which to every man entire
Presents imagined longings to his fire,
To swans the water, bees the honey cell
To bats the dark, to lovers loving well,
Only to the wise may you
Restricting and confining be,
All who half delivered from themselves
Suffer your conspiracy,
Freedom, Freedom, prison of the free.

DIANE DERIAZ (V/O): I first met Lawrence Durrell through his poetry. Oh, it was many years ago and I was very much impressed. I decided to know more about this poet. Of course I've read *The Alexandria Quartet*, the four novels which made him so famous, and the travel books on Rhodes, Cyprus, and Crete and Greece. And it's not only just books about Greece or Cyprus or Crete. It's—there are very deep roots you

This is a selection from a script featuring Diane Deriaz, Lawrence Durrell, and Blanco the Tramp, produced by Margaret McCall for a BBC/Bavarian Television co-production and filmed in Provence. Transmitted 21 March 1970.

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know. He has been living there for so many years. I met him in person—well, I was a stewardess. And I recognized him. “Oh,” I told him, “Oh—I am very—very glad to know you—to meet you. I have read your books. I like them!”

And he looked at me very sharply in the eyes, deep into the eyes—he has very—very sharp eyes—blue eyes—and he—well, I felt I was accepted, you know.

He’s a wonderful—he talks like nobody else, and he—he goes to the centre de gravité, the gravity point of things and people. And he has a tremendously big sense of humour which is fantastic, and he laughs like nobody else.

DIANE: I read your last book, *Tunc*.

DURRELL: In English?

DIANE: No, my English is too bad.

DURRELL: Really—did you try?

DIANE: In French. Yes, I tried in English. I have it in English and in French. And I think it’s—it’s, you are in a new line, if I may say so.

DURRELL: Yes. I don’t know whether for better or for worse, but it’s a new line of enquiry for me, anyway. In playing with this novel I wanted to try and get an idea of what the hell constitutes a culture. Because now we are in danger of losing the little we’ve got—and it’ll take about half a minute—so it’s just the right moment! It’s ripe and delicious at this moment to enquire into what we’ve got—or what we haven’t got.

The awful thing is I can’t come out with any real conclusions.

But do you think one has the right after all to put question marks all the way along? Our whole life is a blasted question mark, isn’t it? What does it mean? We have wonderful ideas about our Freedom, er—

DIANE: Many people think that *Tunc* is a very depressing book—

DURRELL: Yes, but you know, Reality is depressing. It’s only after you’ve found the depressingness of it that you get some joy out of it.

DIANE: But for many people, there—I don’t know how many committed suicide because of your book.

DURRELL: Sure. Och, that’s nice, what a compliment! I like that. Er, you know . . .

DIANE: You hate people so much?

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DURRELL: Well yes. Very much. They're all representations of myself. So, naturally I hate them terribly. No, it *is* depressing. And it's a bit arid. It was an honest form of enquiry I thought. You see, I am not—I am not a good novelist in the old rich sense.

Well, I mean, I don't know, I don't think I'm a terribly good novelist in the orthodox sense of being a good novelist, because all my books seem to be—it's not the characters that are particularly interesting—it's the line of enquiry. They're sort of detective stories in which I use the real characters. Well, in ordinary murder stories, don't they use ordinary dummies—er, d'you know, who are called Mr. Smith and Miss So-and-so. And one gets killed or the other gets killed, and the detective has to find out why or where or what the circumstances are. In mine it is a rather abstract form of enquiry really.

DIANE: The enquiry in *Tunc* is Freedom I should say, no?

DURRELL: Yes, it really was, it's Freedom, yes, certainly, certainly. I made a presupposition which may be really, you know, may be terribly terribly wrong. In all these things you have to take a dangerous path in order to establish an identity between two sets of ideas which are not apparently, you know, not apparently related. The Culture and the Freedom were the two notions in between which I was playing, because I wondered whether you could have a culture without a notion of Freedom. Do you realize how terrifying that thought is?

DIANE: You never wrote a book about Provence, did you? No, never?

DURRELL: You can't—well I don't know—when you live in a place—if I went to Tokyo for a year, I'd find myself writing about Provence. But here . . .

DIANE: And what kind of book about Provence would you like to write?

DURRELL: It's a trick subject you know. It's a trick subject. First of all it's tremendously mutilated by folklore, and there's everything ready—gypsies, bullfighting, and all that. But the one I've seen has been quite, quite different. Much more sinister. Much more simple.

(V/O:) In spending this whole winter with my novel, my book *Tunc*, worrying about the margin of choice of an individual human being and to what extent that connects with the margin of choice of a whole culture; and now we're at the point when it's really a question of big choice—do we start to live or do we just rub the slate clean? And also a bigger question—does it matter?

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I was looking for some—some thing or somebody or some tribe or something, which, by being outside our normal conventions—outside our normal notions of a civilization—might give me some idea of what Freedom might be.

DIANE: Is it what leads you to the tramps, when you say, "I'm so interested in tramps"?

DURRELL: I was interested in them as being outside the frame of everything. You know you can't say "What do you believe?" You can say to anybody else "Do you believe in God?" "Don't you believe in God?" "Are you blue? Are you green? Are you yellow, or something?" And you can get an answer.

DIANE: In which frame are you supposed to be?

DURRELL: I am a tramp. I believe in everything and nothing. But one is always in danger of being croyant pratiquant out of politeness or one thing and another. And what interested me—these boys have been living at the end of my garden for ten years. I've only met four of them. They correspond, they belong clearly to a fellowship which has no fixed beliefs.

Is this interesting? I don't know. It helped me very much while I was fooling about with people who have fixed beliefs. I mean, I presume that General Motors has fixed beliefs. I know the Catholic Church does, I know that the Communists have fixed beliefs. All these people are rigidified. They have got their tripods screwed into the floor, you know. I mean, you can't move—you can't move about.

DIANE: But who is free? Who can be free?

DURRELL: There's no such thing.

DIANE: Do you think free—?

DURRELL: No. But it's an illusion, but it's a fruitful illusion. You mustn't ask what's right or wrong. We must ask what's fruitful and what is unfruitful. The illusion of Freedom is important to civilization—that's how I saw the matter. As the Greeks—the Greeks invented the word "soul." We have never yet been able to anatomise the human body and find a soul in it, but the illusion was so fruitful that it gave us health and strength for nearly 2,000 years—and it may be a complete illusion: that's not the point. Reality—we don't understand Reality yet.

Of course, I've seen hundreds of tramps, and of course Blanco.

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Blanco is the most interesting one. Seems to be rather like the God the Father of the whole lot.

He told me a great deal about tramps. Without—without it seemed to me much reticence. And he inducted me a little bit into their lives, because we met up in the North and I walked with him for a bit of the way.

I began to see a little more deeply into a world which apparently is no world at all.

DIANE: It's a land of nowhere . . .

DURRELL: Yes. But not "*romantic* nowhere." This is what's funny. It's not a mania—you see, if he had been sweet and Borghian; if he'd been a Jew, if he'd been a—I don't know what—an Irishman or something I would have had kelpies, water-buffaloes dancing around me, as in a Hindu masha. I didn't want that, and I didn't get it. He's got nothing. But maybe, that's *it*!

DIANE: And suppose you write your book about the tramps. How would you start?

DURRELL: Poof, oh, I hadn't thought about that . . . but I'd start to lead into something . . .

Yes, I'd like really to find Blanco again.

If I did write a book I think I'd turn it into a sort of quest really. I'd imagine, perhaps, that you came along. The travelling life that tramps lead has its own element of mystery. It follows the same logic of the seasons as the wild flowers do—though what happens to them, the tramps, in the winter nobody yet seems to know. Do they hibernate like the snakes do, to take care of the three winter months? Yet when the snows begin to melt the magnetism of the sun does its work and they begin the long journey south towards it over the bleak mountains which look towards the Mediterranean.

It's when you are almost across the barrier of the Cevennes—the Cevennes—that bony vertebral column which divides off Provence and Languedoc from the rest of France—that you first feel that life of elation, the promise, I suppose, of the fat and smiling plains which lie ahead. On those mountain roads they move, always one by one, always solitary . . . never in groups. And one wonders why. Often they are separated by only a few miles. Do they also feel the lift of the heart when they smell the vegetation about to change from mountain pine, mulberry and walnut, to olive and holm oak and cypress? They cross the Col d'Exil

like small black flies. Would they make these long journeys if they were not drawn by something in the landscape they traverse?

Like these rare birds, for example, which winter in Egypt every year, coming from the far corners of Poland, Germany . . . But these are men, they're not birds. We call them tramps. We never say beggars or gypsies.

They do not even regard the weather and the lack of decent accommodation as a hardship. At least I have never heard one complain about it. The only real complaint they have to make is about shoe-leather . . .

It's a very singular kind of non-conformism that is being practiced, singular because it is not based it seems on any belief, religious or philosophic. The mystery is perhaps there.

DIANE: Yes, but do you think it's really possible to live without any philosophy?

DURRELL: No, but that is—now you've said the wonderful thing. This is the starting point of my interest, because we are all wondering the same thing.

Is it possible to live happily in the world, to integrate yourself in some way, without a philosophy—a religion—something that ties you down?

In fact, it comes down to the whole matter of Liberty, now.

So as I was interested in the Liberty—as a poet—of what I was doing, what I was thinking, how I was living, and my relationship to the world—

(V/O:) I saw these strange spectral figures crossing the territory—this little bit of land I own there, dry, waterless stuff.

There are a series of extraordinary little things. They call them "bourris" in the Val, but here they call them "capitols."

Funny little cyclopean stone structures, which I suppose—Have you seen them? Well the tramps come through, this is one of the main roads.

I got interested in them, sociologically first, then philosophically, then religiously. I have not quite found out what they're doing, but they're much more fascinating than wild birds—

But Provence is full of these empty bourris. They use them. They call them their houses, you see. All solitaires, they've abandoned domesticity.

The joys of marriage, so-called. Nicht? Schnitt, in fact. Absolutely nothing.

Now what they are about is curious. They have a few signs, an alphabet worthy of a schoolchild. About ten signs you know . . .

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A circle . . . Pythagorean sign, with a cross, meaning a good holy house where you can count on the alms. And then an amusing one—a triangle saying “A woman alone,” and a triangle upside down saying “Too many—too many tramps pass by here. It is spoilt!”

DIANE: Mm. But I don't know why you said you are a tramp at the mazet. You are not a tramp. I am more a tramp than you are.

DURRELL: Yes, I know. It's pretentious to say that. But I was thinking of poetry you know . . . How shall I say . . . In the little I've discovered about Blanco and this question of being outside categories without being pretentious, without having any special religion or any attitude or something . . . his attitude to choice . . . seems to me exactly the same ecstasy that an artist has vis-à-vis his empty canvas or his empty sheet of paper. Because your choice is limitless. You have the whole vocabulary of the language you are working in, or the whole vocabulary of the paints that are available to you. But with that blank sheet you have at every instant choice. And as the novel I was fooling with was concerned with these problems of how cultures go wrong or go right or achieve things or fail or get blown up or whatever—it seemed to me that the question of identity in choice was terribly important. And I wondered whether these funny, ragged men passing at the end of the garden and having absolutely nothing . . . no alphabet, no cultural baggage, don't even carry umbrellas! . . . But I had to find out.

DIANE: Well Larry, what I feel is that both of you—I mean the tramps in which you are now so much interested, and the artistes—are outsiders. You are in a way an outsider as Blanco is an outsider, and you are—you don't belong to the same family but you have certain points in common.

DURRELL: Ah yes, but that's the point of—that's what I thought—that is the point of departure. For me—any artistic act was an act of nonconformity. I think that is true. In fact the whole point of departure was in a Greek proverb, you know. “There are many roads to Freedom, and all lonely ones.” It makes a collision of the two ideas, you see.

Of an absolute
Freedom of choice
accompanied by loneliness.

This is where Blanco lies up. Not this particular one . . . but there are thousands all over this landscape.

How would you bed down for the night? Big thunderstorm, say. How would you bed down—big thunderstorm, imagine—you come in here at night.

DIANE: It's not so clean, I must say, Larry.

DURRELL: But if you want to be free you have to make some sacrifices there. Ah, carrières . . . quarries, quarries everywhere, abandoned by every kind of class, of civilization. This I suppose is Roman, they say.

Look at the pruning.

Hey, it's got an echo. Would you like to try one?

DIANE: Aha! Oohoo, aha! (Blanco's faint singing under:)

"On a bien rigolé, on s'est bien amusé,
aviez pompom, aviez pompom,
. pompier.

Il y avait monsieur le maire,
monsieur le. ,

la femme.

On a bien rigolé, on s'est bien amusé,
Aviez pompom, aviez pompom,
. pompier!"

DURRELL: This forgotten corner here. You know that, that the big Pont du Gard—the classical one that everybody photographs and so on? Between here and the village of Vers the whole thing collapsed and it's got half buried underground. It's part of the original works which has fallen apart.

DIANE: In your books the landscapes are often as important as the people. And what do you mean when you—you say that the people are a function of the landscape?

DURRELL: Er, eh bien, you must suspect me there, very deeply. You see, I have no country. I mean, I am British, Irish Basutian, brought up in India, Colonial and so on. And I haven't lived in any particular place for more than eight years you see. But in each place that I have lived I've noticed that the inhabitants grow up in function to their place. And the people who feel integrated to a landscape and act in that sense can achieve healthy lives inside a function, and die healthily—and they produce some good manure for the vines, which is always important.

DIANE: And your Blanco—he's the Blanco he is because of the landscape he is living in?

DURRELL: No—there you've hit something. He is international. He could be English . . . I don't mean English dans le Gard.

DIANE: Not because of the weather . . .

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DURRELL: Oh all right, I mean, yes, you're quite right there. Could be German or anything. But the type that he represents is outside a landscape function.

DIANE: And you are so varié because you—you touch so many different countries in your case?

DURRELL: Well, as a writer you're a sort of prostitute you see. In order to see a bit deeply you have to identify and you have this . . .

DIANE: You mean you make love with a landscape as a girl makes love with a man?

DURRELL: Yes, of course.

DIANE: And why did you say that a tramp is a dangerous threat to his tribe?

DURRELL: I mean, I was asking, not telling. Because you see, any departure from an absolute norm which has been accepted by everybody as part of this function of saving everything—conserving—which is a death function—which is fear of death function—naturally anything individual gets the enormous reaction. So the tramp gets the sort of reaction that Beethoven got or Shakespeare got. Instant denial. And then, after twenty years, acceptance. The new is the most frightening thing. It's like being born all the time you know. The piercing of the ears with—with sound, the eyes with light, and so on—must be the most painful experience. And so the piercing of a culture with any new idea is obviously met with big biological resistance.

DIANE (V/O): Do you think Blanco had a pre-wisdom that our civilization has spoiled?

DURRELL (V/O): Yes. Yes, I dare to say yes, you know—it's a very hesitating yes. He might be the missing link between culture and non-culture, in the sense that the instinct that makes him choose solitude is not a religious one, which is already artificial and cultural. I mean, we've had plenty of examples of a religious choice of solitude. It isn't that at all. It seems much nearer to instinct than to belief. The only place I can detect anything which is really original from my point of view is this question that he never knows where he's going to lie that night. And as I say, the ecstasy of choice seems to be the only thing.

DIANE (V/O, sings song):

“..... ma chaine.”

DURRELL (V/O, over Diane's singing):

I live much more in the work I do than in real life, which makes me rather a failure in real life. My real life is rather a failure, rather hollow. A sort of pretense. I regard myself as diseased. What I'm really actively engaged in is knocking words together. And most of my thoughts are really on that wave length. But if I was lucky enough not to work at all I might have time to think as Blanco thinks or find out some other way.

DIANE: Do you think—

DURRELL: The only thing is to incite the feeling of Liberty and Freedom in everybody, so that they can identify more and more with the Universe . . . this mysterious Universe of which they are a part.

DIANE: You asked me once, Larry, if I thought my life was absurd, do you remember? And I said "Yes, but perhaps not more than many lives you know." And how is yours for you? Is it absurd or not?

DURRELL: Yes, of course, it is absurd if you want absolute values. Thing about life is you have to compromise, no—? And this, of course, is the worry, in a sense, one should go straight into non-compromise—non-conformity—and you can't. Well, if you put it on the ordinary philosophic plane—a free wheel, or predetermined, predetermination or free wheel—which? We have to act as though we had free wheel, but to what degree are we predetermined? Hence this little enquêt, this little enquiry—both in the books and—er—people. And then Freedom—it's within everybody's fee, as we call it in English—in everybody's choice.

DIANE: Yes, you said—you said, "Blanco told me 'I'm not afraid of life, which is freedom, and therefore . . .'"

DURRELL: Yes, but what I was too tactful to say to him was "What value do you put on suicide?" Because finally—finally that is the test. If you are bored here you can go elsewhere. And so it's really a—the value that one puts on death, or what death does to one that dictates very much how one lives—how one thinks in life?

Nicht?

DIANE: Yes. And are you afraid of death?

DURRELL: I don't truthfully think I am very afraid of death. I am much more afraid, I think anyone can give you this answer, of being ill or having a limb broken, or being smashed up by a car. Pain I should say is much more of a funk thing.

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DIANE: And of death?

DURRELL: Of death—we know so little about it. First of all, here we are surrounded by it.

I'm sorry the sexton isn't here today, he could tell you about the—he speaks about digging a grave here like we speak about planting cabbages. There isn't enough room and the earth is extraordinarily bony, and when it rains he comes here instantly because he can go another metre down and so on. Very Hamlet, I mean, very Hamlet.

DIANE: And your Blanco is not afraid of death. All right, perhaps he has no imagination. And he is not afraid of life. Perhaps he doesn't think about it. He doesn't care. He is living in the present every day and . . .

DURRELL: But *that's* what's so hard to do, you see?

DIANE: Are you so much afraid of life?

DURRELL: Of course. Yes, aren't you?

DIANE: No.

DURRELL: Now we're in the period of harvest . . . harvest of souls, says the Curé, is a harvest too . . . and the harvest's being picked all round us that's picked now.

DIANE: Well—it's the contrary of death—harvest. It's life.

DURRELL: I wonder whether they are not joined you know. In the ancient Greek representation they are joined at the waist . . . life and death. In other words you are dying and living—and living and dying at the same time—how to get that oscillation between the two is surely the problem.

At any rate, talking of harvest and so on and so forth, occasionally it will be Blanco—does a couple of days' turn in order to get his stoop of wine, you know. He crawls about in the vines picking off the stuff and he gets his pay for it.

DIANE: You think you are sure we can never reach—we can never touch Freedom completely? But in spite of that you are playing with that idea . . .

DURRELL: That's why I brought you on all this absurd thing. This is where I lost Blanco.

When I woke in the morning he'd vanished you see. But I was

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thinking too, another thing, having disembarassed himself of so much cultural stuff—you know, his only equipment is a candle, a box of matches and so on.

(V/O:) It struck me, thinking the other day, that he's a far more permanent figure in the landscape than perhaps all the others. You know, when you think of the history of the place—shot over by Romans, Greeks, Goths, Vandals of every kind, d'you see. We have various pictures, historic pictures. But he's, you see, he's a permanent part of the culture here.

In every generation whatever happens, there are these clochards. And by travelling very light perhaps they ensure a kind of permanence which more solidified cultural types don't have.

DIANE: You mean we are too heavy. We are not light enough, for being free?

DURRELL: Not travelling light enough, no. But in ordinary life isn't that the case for you? I mean? One has to every six months practically clean out the kitchen and throw out a lot of stuff which one bought because one might have needed it.

DIANE: You are not fascinated enough to give up everything to follow his trade?

DURRELL: He doesn't ask that. Anyway he didn't leave any sign when he woke up.

And I woke up late that morning. It's rather like Freedom. When you awake it isn't there.

DIANE: But does he say "I'm free!"?

DURRELL: The idea has never entered his head—so that's perhaps why he is.

DIANE: Well, you've got a very important point. Perhaps you are free also, and I am free, and we don't know it.

DURRELL: Ah, yes. Well, the analogy, you know, that the Zen boys give you is quite sane. You know—looking for—looking for your spectacles all over the house and then you find them on top of your head.

DIANE: In the second part of *Tunc* you've just finished, did you—did you go—very far in these investigations?

DURRELL: Well, I went as far as I could go. Roughly speaking the idea

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was that these cultures which are all defensive as we were saying, and are tremendously heavy-weight to bear round our necks . . . become yokes—they start off as brilliant ideas and they become weights on our backs. But no individual has enough force to escape them. You can only really be free in the freed sense if everybody's free. In other words, if everybody decides to re-orient the culture on an agreed path, then there is a hope that we could be free.

DIANE: "Freedom, Freedom—prison of the free!" What does the last line mean exactly?

DURRELL: Well, there you come right back to it. If you hold the notion of Freedom too hard in your mind, and if you have an *arrière pensée*, a *préjugé* about it, then obviously you vitiate it. It must be spontaneous, or it isn't really free. People who have exaggerated notions of Freedom, d'you see, usually end up in prisons of their devising.

DIANE: And when Blanco decides to go somewhere, how does he decide it?

DURRELL: Well, that's funny! He throws his hat—his cap in the air, high in the air, and watches it fall, and orients himself by it and off he goes.

DURRELL: You know the old song—"Where do flies go in the wintertime?" Isn't it funny you know, you never see dead tramps. I often wonder whether there isn't a tramp cemetery somewhere in the mountains, you know.

DIANE: You are too poetic.

DURRELL: I agree—I'm spoiling everything. Perhaps one shouldn't ask these questions. . . .

Diane and Durrell walk back to camera along seashore. Music theme. Blanco stands at crossroads. He throws his cap in the air. He picks up cap and walks away down the lane. (Blanco sings:)

"Non, non, tu n'as pas ma rose,
Non, non, tu n'auras rien,
Monsieur le curé a défendu la chose,
Non, non, tu n'auras pas ma rose,
Non, non, tu n'auras rien."

Singing continues after vision. Fade sound.

Alexandria Revisited

WRITTEN AND PRESENTED BY PETER ADAM

From Lawrence Durrell's Notes:

In 1975 the BBC took me back to Greece to make a film called *Spirit of Place*, based on my island books and the memories of the years when I lived there. In between these happy Greek years lay darker ones, marked by war, which I had spent in Cairo and Alexandria. In 1977 the director Peter Adam suggested we travel again together, this time to Egypt, to the scenes of *The Alexandria Quartet*, and try to touch all the points which, either from a literary or personal point of view, meant something to me, or marked me or moved me.

Filming is a sort of composite art—one is always manufacturing the work of two or three people and trying to assemble it into a coherent image. The writer is a solitary animal sitting in a garret, and when the stuff comes off his typewriter nobody else interferes with it. So to try and make a film about a subject which was precious and probably, from a general point of view, out of date was a trepidation added to traditional neuroses.

The idea filled me with unease. After 30 years or so, the country must have changed. And I myself? Had I changed also, as Egypt must have?

From Peter Adam's Diary:

Cairo, 17th October, 1977

Our plane is 3 hours late. All through the flight Larry has been grumpy, cursing himself. He had seen the film I made about his Greek island books only the night before our departure, and felt that "he had

These passages are from Peter Adam's diary, kept during the filming with Lawrence Durrell of *Spirit of Place: Egypt*.

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given too much of his personal feelings away." "My god, what a lot of drivel," he pronounced, hiding his anger behind some gauche compliments. While the plane hovers and sinks over Cairo in a colourful sunset, he begins to marvel about the constancy of nature. Once earth-bound we are invited to the VIP lounge, a sort of old-fashioned hotel lobby filled with Saudi sheiks, Japanese businessmen and a sprinkling of distinguished British Embassy employees with their assorted wives. Larry moans, so we decide it would be better to supervise the unloading of our luggage in the official arrival hall. Larry sits patiently on his rather tacky looking suitcase enjoying the huge pandemonium, admiring the "now uncovered" faces of the Egyptian women, a sight he was not prepared for. In the meantime I count the pieces of luggage—19, 21, 23, 26, cameras, tripods, suitcases and all. Once inside our little bus which will take us to Alexandria, and strengthened by a rather wine-laden meal, Larry begins to relax. During the 3-hour drive along the long dusty road to the old sea-port he entertains us with stories about the war when he regularly took this road. We arrive in the middle of the night at the old Cecil Hotel. He rejoices; the old place seemed to be as it was when Justine met Nessim. But our joy is clouded over when we discover that our rooms have been given away. I have to spell Durrell's name 4 times to the receptionist. We finally manage to get one room for him where he sleeps surrounded by our 27 pieces of luggage. Not a very glamorous return after 32 years absence.

Alexandria, 18th October 1977

At breakfast in the old dining room served by splendid Nubian waiters in snow-white turbans, Larry talks about the extravagant and colourful life in wartime Alexandria at the old Cecil Hotel. It was then the centre of everything that happened in the press corps. The long line of visitors included Andre Gide, the Greek poet Seferis and Patrick Leigh Fermor . . . and munching a croissant he describes laughingly the dancer Diana Gould (now Mrs. Menuhin) doing an *entrechat* on the roof:

It was a good writing period, in a sense, though, of course, the war was an exhausting moment to think about writing, because there was no future attached to anything one did. But perhaps it was a good thing, in a way, because it compressed up life, and forced one to do what one should always do: namely, not think about tomorrow. Live entirely for today.

After breakfast we set out, following E. M. Forster's advice, "the

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best way to see Alexandria is to walk aimlessly," in search of locations for filming, and most of all to find the house Lawrence Durrell lived in. It is a brilliant day. I quote bits of *Justine* to Larry: "I saw inverted in the sky a full-scale mirage of the city luminous and trembling, as if painted on dusty silk." Larry has forgotten the address of his old house, but he strides through the streets. There are moments of discovery, of delight and recognition. "The trees . . . the Greek bookshop which saved me . . ." and then we stumble upon the house, an enchanting place with a garden littered with broken columns and statues. He climbs up the stairs to the tower where he wrote *Prospero's Cell* and some poems for *Personal Landscape*. "Here we sat for dinner," he shouts. "There is the studio of the woman who owned the place, the studio where Clea worked." The memories come tumbling out, like in the old days when he kept scrapbooks full of cinema tickets or leaves, "an old garbage-heap of stuff, a bus ticket or an entry to the Alexandria Museum stuck in a book is full of radium and even years afterwards flipping through it you suddenly remember whole sections of things which come in useful in writing." We go on to find the mosque where Scobie worshipped and the little Tatwig Street, and we find them. The name of the street has changed, but Larry shouts gaily at the people, "El Scob, El Scob! I'm sure these people remember him. I'm sure they worship this old sod." Grivas, the old bookshop, is no more, but Eve's father's café is still there, less elegant and rather run down. We have coffee together. Then Larry rushes again through the streets. We can hardly keep up with him. First into some bookshops where he laments the poor stock. "They used to be full of La Pleyade editions." Then to an old Greek tavern Larry used to love; a healthy dose of ouzo puts Larry in the right mood for a siesta. In the afternoon Larry lets us film him while the barber of the hotel shaves him and applies a facemask. He comes out looking like ninety. The rumour that the famous Lawrence Durrell is in town has spread. The lady who owns the house has invited a few local celebrities to meet him. Larry doesn't want to go, but is too polite and too much of a social coward to refuse. "Please save me from social do's," he says to me, and then wanders off, grumpy and totally bored.

Alexandria, 19th October, 1977

Larry is up as usual at 6 o'clock doing his yoga. The noise of cars and fleabites have kept him awake, so it's not surprising that he is ill-tempered. Also I suspect the thought of doing our first interview annoys him tremendously. Although a brilliant interviewee, Larry hates

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doing it. During the Greek trip we did nine interviews at different places, all of them exceptional, but his natural modesty and a certain shyness of producing himself make every interview an ordeal for him. As usual he is reluctant to speak about himself or his work. He hides his fear of boring people behind mockery and jokes. It is difficult to keep him on a serious track. But once he gets going his language, even in speech, is polished. He piles image upon image of Alexandria, and he catches for us the true spirit of the place. In phrases like this you find the real Durrell:

Here you smell the desert and you smell the heart of Africa being poured down that funnel the Nile, like smoke, and arriving in silt in this big delta. As a matter of fact, Egypt begins out at sea way outside in the deep harbour—beyond the harbour, in fact—you realise you're approaching another soil, and whatever the Greeks have done to Hellenize this town it does smell of desert, and it does have its khamseens—desert winds. And it gives the air a prattling, lustful sort of quality which, mingled with the sea, is very bracing and rather disorienting. You could easily go mad here.

Pursewarden, it turns out, is his favourite character, but he is reticent to talk too much about the characters—he has not read the *Quartet* for over twenty years. A technical fault in the camera forces us to repeat ten minutes of the interview, and as usual it is not as good as the first time round. But Larry is good natured, and generously accepts it when I attack him for using almost too rich a language. “Yes, I know, I know. It’s a charge I find difficult to refute. I know I tend to overwrite”:

... but also it's terribly difficult when you're working over four books, you know, and you want to keep your colours fresh. After all, how many adjectives are there for a palm tree? Very difficult to keep it fresh. And every time it comes up it has to have a new label attached to it. So it's got to be pristine. So naturally I revved the motor up as much as possible, in order to keep the colours from becoming dull.

Durrell's hostess from last night, a stunningly beautiful woman, a mix of Anaïs Nin and Isak Dinesen, lets us into a drawing room filled with her own paintings. She knew “Clea,” who has since died. She wears a brown tunic and her beautiful face is framed by a headscarf. Two long turquoise earrings and a long necklace of different coloured amber complete the picture.

I ask Durrell if there are any real people in the *Quartet*. “No, they're all tremendously composite, in that rather evanescent form.” And we

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talk about the fact that few writers have an unlimited fund of personalities and that one always has to fall back on the same sort of characters:

Alas, yes. Because the number, the ratio, the amount of people one meets in a lifetime really isn't all that numerous—people who mark you, I mean. So you're forced to use the narrow range that you have inside yourself, of meetings and situations and places. That's why I'm so grateful to have travelled so widely, and have been mixed up in all kinds of different situations, because I really have got, I think, a fairly large ragbag full of possibilities.

Alexandria, 20th October 1977

We film in the reconstructed living room of the Alexandrian poet Cavafy. The little museum is filled with oriental furniture. It is very moving to see Larry sitting at the desk Cavafy wrote at. Larry studies the books which fill the shelves lining the room, mostly French—a lot of Corneille, Racine, Musset. Few English books except for the Oxford dictionary. A row of the History of Costume, some German book on Byzantium. Larry talks touchingly about the great Alexandrian poet and reads for us from "The City" in Durrell's own translation. He refuses the idea that Cavafy is Balthazar but concedes that he has "been tarnished" by him. "Cavafy is more like Tiresias," he says, "who moves through the minds of the characters of the *Quartet*." After the interview we pay a fleeting visit to Cavafy's old house, which is now a pension above a brothel.

After lunch we film the streets of Alexandria. "Alexandria. Princess and whore, the royal city and the anus mundi," as Larry described it in *Clea*. Or, as he now says, "Alexandria, teetering like the house in the Chaplin film on the edge of the precipice . . . always in despair." For the dinner at a rich Alexandrian house Larry has put on a tie and looks delightfully scruffy. Larry is very flirtatious, and much taken by the voluptuous and elegant ladies of French, Greek and Jewish origins, real products of Alexandria, the sort of people which inhabit the *Quartet*. Everybody of course wants to know who is who in the *Quartet*. Although totally bored, Larry accepts the questions gracefully. Beautiful women can get away with anything. If I had put such silly questions, I would have had my head bitten off. Later, in his room, before he goes to sleep, I ask him why his characters are so wounded by sex:

It's obviously the weak point. It's not only Alexandria, it's the whole of Europe. And as they are the seminal part of a culture . . . You see, it's also a critique of our twentieth-century notions.

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What I was using, using as best I could, the available psychology of our epoch, do you see? Under the terms of that, the double-sexed thing—which is an ancient gnostic thing—was a very important weapon that I tried to use. Because in talking about love, you make love with the opposite side of yourself, so to speak. The male has to mobilize the female in himself, and the female has to mobilise the male in herself, otherwise you don't get a love affair four square. You get it stunted in some way.

And that, by the grace of Freud and God combined seemed to me suggestive and quite possible to achieve. At least it would be a sort of ideal worth expressing. So I tried to pass my characters a bit through the wringer of sex, so to speak, in the hope that the dice will fall out of their pockets and assume that sort of fortunate configuration: which did, in the last volume, suggest that it was going to happen.

Alexandria, 21st October 1977

Larry very funny about last night. "The beauty of these women is their low IQ. It's like making love to crème Chantilly." It is a day for joking. Two enormous tarts in leather mini-skirts pass our table. According to Larry, they have just been laid by an English sailor. Larry breaks out into ecstatic cries: "Thank you, thank you, Egypt! What magnetism, what magical wobble!" He has a terrible cold and tries to cure it with massive doses of scotch. He reads to me from the *Egyptian Gazette* a report about an English lady who had a child by a gorilla. "The child is living off nuts," he adds. The childlike joy, the grumpiness, the feeling of being bored all lie only skin deep under the surface and can break out at any moment. Later he tells me that he read Isak Dinesen here in Alexandria and that he wrote her a fan letter. He tells me that when she was very old she used to go upstairs touching, like the blind, the vast map of Africa on the wall. He also tells me about meeting Borges when he lived in Argentina. In the evening, in the hotel bar, a few Egyptian beauties, one looking like Justine—but Larry has gone to bed.

Alexandria 22nd October 1977

Last day. We film a beautiful scene—the beach at Chatby. The little tin tram "which bore Melissa and Darley with the clicking of its wheels" is still there, and so are "the mansions where Nessim and Justine gave their parties":

Here and there the remains of properties abandoned by owners too poor or too lazy. Their gates, half-smothered in bougainvillaea, opened rustily into gardens of wild and unkempt

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beauty where marble fountains and rotted statuary still testified to a glory since departed.

The girl we baptise "Justine" comes to the hotel with a copy of the book *Justine*, and Larry signs it cheerfully. He asks Dimitri, his old photographer friend who has come with us, to take a photograph of him, and while clowning around at the table, he baptises the photograph "Elephant slicing Feta."

Cairo, 23rd October 1977

We stay at the Menahouse Hotel. Larry and I talk about the German theatre and the famous actor Gustav Gründgens. I am surprised to hear that Gründgens produced Durrell's play *Sappho*, with Maximilian Schell and Elizabeth Flickenschild. Larry also wrote *An Irish Faustus* for him. We talk about the poet Gottfried Benn. "A very good poet." Henry Miller has sent Larry a book by Erica Jong. "It's filthy, terribly written, but Henry likes it." Later on we talk about Larry's weakness in plot. I am touched again by how he listens to criticism, and how readily he accepts it. While he walks around in his bathroom in his red nylon bathroom slippers which he pinched from his hostess Mrs. Thomas in London, he apologises for his constant change of mood: "I had a bad year. The divorce, and all that." Together we watch the great Egyptian cliché, the sun setting behind the pyramids from the terrace of my room. Suddenly Larry says: "Too much talk in the world. When two people love each other, silence sets in."

Cairo, 24th October 1977

Interviewing Larry at the feet of the Sphinx. He is full of witty phrases like "Look at this elephant graveyard of sculpture":

You can read the desert in the two extremes of character, particularly in Egypt. You get the immense aestheticism absolutely side by side with an absolutely agonising sensuality.

There are many different types of sphinx. They are friendly things, and when you wake up in the morning and look out at them, it's like looking out at a petrified elephant of some sort. We don't really know much about it and we're forced to gossip; in spite of all the fragments of information that have been gathered, there seems to be something of an enigma that hasn't yet been solved. I'm not speaking about the riddle of the sphinx—the last stop press was by Freud.

But soon he changes again to joking and talks about mosquitoes looking innocent but having snouts of fire. He talks also about old times, about the cookery writer Elizabeth David. "The Jane Austen of the cuisine," as

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he calls her. I try to bring the interview back to serious ground, but to no avail. There are more anecdotes about a belly-dancer rotating on a boat like an enormous top until the entire boat turned over and they all found themselves in the Nile. But then comes some magic moment such as only Larry can produce. Forgetting the camera (or does he ever?) he suddenly recites a few lines of a poem: "Palms and tombs/ Tombs and palms/ A river flowing like smoke/ Under a sky weighing a ton." The poet Durrell, as so often, had saved the interview.

Cairo, 25th October 1977

Larry much elated to find that a shop he phoned up to describe a special most effective incense burner against mosquitoes have delivered what turns out to be a Nose Vick. I am less cheerful because Larry's early morning call for his yoga at 4:30 has come to my room. I feel that Larry is longing to go back home. He is bored with the whole undertaking. The constant presence of all these people is difficult for him. His bad mood affects us all. Also he drinks quite heavily. As a result his breathing is difficult, and his interviews not what I hoped they would be. We have 18 more days to go and I am rather worried.

Cairo, 26th October 1977

We drive into the desert to the Coptic monastery of Wadi Natroun. Larry is totally changed again, enthusiastic and co-operative. After a few hours' drive we reach this marvellous place in the desert: a small monastery, the colour of the desert under a burning sky, only a few palms give some relief. We begin by filming a church service. "Outside you could hear the noises of the desert, inside only the grumble of the word." Larry, like all of us, is much moved by the beauty of the singing, the place and its peacefulness. The black-hooded monks receive us with enormous kindness, and we share their meal consisting of a simple but strong lentil soup, homemade bread, water and sardines. Later we film the monks walking with Larry through the desert. The monks giggle like little girls while Larry keeps a solemn and serious face, but he looks happy. I try to do an interview on religion, but Larry brushes away any suggestion of religion putting up shield after shield when I get too personal.

PETER ADAM: Are you yourself a religious person?

DURRELL: No, no. I don't think so. Do I look like it?

PETER ADAM: You say you're not a religious person, but you have a great affinity to mystic qualities.

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DURRELL: Well, I'm simply trying to find out where I fit in the universe you know.

PETER ADAM: Where do you think you fit?

DURRELL: Well, I'm trying not to show!

PETER ADAM: Were you ever tempted by any monastic life?

DURRELL: I think everyone is, don't you? I don't know any exceptions. Because the bleakness has a great appeal, I think. Also one has the hint that one might get closer to an understanding of oneself if one resisted the enormous current of worldly noise which is going on about one, which prevents one from really thinking.

PETER ADAM: This search for truth, is that something which came to you through age or have you always had it?

DURRELL: No, everybody's got it. Don't talk as though I'm a leper! Everybody's got it. I'm simply representative, slightly more articulate than most people of the same malady.

Cairo, 27th October 1977

This time it is my turn to be ill. Larry gives me a sort of opium-based remedy which makes me dizzy. I think we have reached the point where we have got used to each other, and our fourth interview is splendid:

It is very strange to come back to it now, after such a lapse of time, and to find this country relatively unchanged, because the emanations of the ground (and one verifies them by going from one sacred site to another, in the course of making this film) seem to me on the same frequency, the same vibrations, and the changes are simply superficial. In fact, from time to time you hear the winter cuckoo instead of the spring cuckoo of Greece.

There is a particular kind of emanation, a context, a signature of any given country, which is expressed through its wild flowers, through its trees, its plants, its flora and its fauna and its human beings who form part of that. And that is the basic kernel, it cannot be altered. You have Augustuses and Caligulas, and you have dictatorships and democracies and so on, and they all follow one another.

But they are purely waves that flow along the surface of the country's history, and underneath there is something very stable and that will need a new Ice Age to change. Well, that is, of course, what we mean by the "spirit of place."

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I am very pleased because *Spirit of Place* is the title I have given to this series.

Cairo, 28th October 1977

We dine with an Egyptian journalist. When I attack him about the way educated Egyptians do let the country run down, Larry defends Egypt and attacks England in return. "Civilisation there is measured by courtesies," he exclaims angrily.

Cairo, 29th October 1977

Day off. Larry and I go to meet the great Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy who wrote *Architecture for the Poor* and who built the village of Gournā. We sit with this great old man on the roof of his house, and while Fathy explains to us the shape of the minarets, Larry listens carefully. Fathy tells us that trees are wiser than man and talks about organic shapes. It occurs to me that Larry, living alone in Sommières, has lost almost all taste for intelligent conversation. Living alone has made him crawl more and more into himself; the only conversation he has is with his books. Looking at the vivacious and enthusiastic 85-year-old Fathy, I think how outwardly burnt-out Durrell appears at only 65.

Cairo, 30th October 1977

Filming in the oasis of Fayoun, one of the most beautiful scenes of country life we have yet seen. Everywhere the creaking of the water wheels and mud-brick houses nestling in palm groves, donkeys sleeping under mango trees. The countryside is in constant rhythmic move; people riding on donkeys borne down by their weight, camels carrying huge jars, crossing little bridges over canals. Larry is in his worst mood, totally bored with it all; he doesn't even bother to get out of the car; only once when we reach a pottery village of indescribable black dirt and dust—one can hardly breathe—does he step out. I feel hurt by his indifference, more sorry for him than myself, and I have to remind myself that it was I who dragged this reticent man away from the peacefulness of his home and desk, and made him clown around in front of cameras. I feel rather ashamed of my impatience. The day is not saved by an evening given by a French newspaper owner, who had invited Larry and myself for a lavish dinner. As always, Larry is furious that he has been used for some social occasion and as usual is too polite or too cowardly to decline the invitation.

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Cairo, 31st October 1977

Larry surprised me at breakfast with a copy of *Monsieur*. He has put a beautiful drawing inside and has written "Peter, thank you for such patient and careful work, burnishing my image with your pious filming." I feel ashamed about yesterday, and there are more surprises. In the interview which we film the same morning, he describes beautifully and astutely the scenes he had watched yesterday stubbornly from the car.

Cairo, 1st November 1977

In the Egyptian papers is a huge spread on our filming. Larry is not displeased, reading it to us. Later on, another interviewer talks to him at the poolside. "How long does it take you, Mr. Durrell, to write a novel?" Larry replies politely. I could have thrown the journalist from the *Egyptian Gazette* into the water.

Larry has promised to give up drinking and he sticks to it. News comes from London that our rushes are beautiful. Everybody is happy.

Cairo, 2nd November 1977

Getting up early at 3:30 to catch the plane to Aswan. Only Larry can stand up cheerfully to such an ordeal. Once in Aswan, Larry is delighted that the old Cataract Hotel is still there. We film him sitting in the old wicker chairs shaded by carpet hangings while beautifully dressed Nubian waiters serve him tea. It looks like time has stood still. Larry remembers:

There was a very pleasant night train, a sort of Edinburgh express, which jogged up here, comfortably. And you arrived in the morning.

And the place had an endearing mixture of Darjeeling and Bournemouth. I can't swear that there were bath chairs with a line of liveried attendants, but there were practically.

There were certainly some old nannies on this terrace, brooding over their knitting.

And somewhere inside was what looked like the remains of some Edwardian gun room, full of books, which you had to get the key to a cupboard to examine. And they were all Tauschnitz editions of early novels, Victorian novels—nanny novels, in fact, *Mill on the Floss* and Charles Reade, and that sort of stuff. Ideal reading if you were a little nervous or upset—stomach upset or nervous upset. And here, of course, one was sent for a rest cure if one had been ill, because in Cairo one traditionally got ill. The breakfast on that train was particularly memorable, and I have been spending all night trying to remember—what one was

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served at dawn was marvellous coffee with Bath Oliver biscuits (that lovely shortbread) and mango juice, followed by the traditional English breakfast.

Aswan, 3rd November 1977

This time it's Colin Waldek, our wonderful and patient cameraman who has been struck by Montezuma's revenge. He is so ill we cannot film, so we have the day off. The beauty of the Nile inspires Larry to the most beautiful passages in our whole film. While sliding along the water in one of the feluccas I suggest to him that he write Piers' lost diary in *Monsieur* as a diary of the trip on the Nile. I am surprised to find out that he had totally forgotten that he had left himself this loophole in the book.

With his usual modesty he thanks me for reminding him. We buy a horrible-looking pair of plastic earrings, Larry bargaining fiercely; he wants to have them set in Sommières ("for a female") and talks about them as if they were real diamonds. He has no feeling for any material goods and can live in the most modest of circumstances.

Aswan, 4th November 1977

Wake up at six o'clock and spot Larry on his balcony next to mine. The sun is just tinting the island opposite. Small white houses, a few groups of palm trees, the first feluccas mark the mirrored surface of the water, but their sails are still closed. The river has hardly begun to stir. We both look on silently, each of us from our separate balconies. Then he calls over "Peter, we must catch that feeling in our film." In the afternoon, floating along this great river, Larry gives a memorable interview. He is a changed person. He had kept his promise and not touched a drop of alcohol:

The life-blood of Egypt, to mix an accurate metaphor, is really the water: the long steady ribbon of water flowing down from the heart of Africa towards the sea. It carries not only the rich Nilotic silt but also the whole trade of Egypt with the outside world.

It is as precious as it is protean, and everywhere one hears the characteristic squalling and shrieking or whispering and thudding of the ubiquitous *sakkia* of Egypt—the water wheels.

If you sleep in the country, they have to be got used to. The sound can be maddening at night.

But it is eternally there, eternally flowing out of the darkness of Africa, so various in its tones and speeds that it is always different even in its sameness. Sometimes it runs like steel.

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Sometimes it slows down to the pace of smoke. Sometimes, in blocked canals, it turns green with slime and has to be purged.

But water is always there, water prime. It is the bloodstream of the Egyptian soul and the nervous system of the country's life.

Abu Simbel, 5th November 1977

Flying to Abu Simbel we spot the "salvaged monuments" from the air. Once land-bound, we quickly escape the herds of tourists to find a quiet spot to film. Larry gives a complicated interview about prime symbols which needs pruning. A marvellous moment occurs when Larry, sitting in front of those venerable monuments, claims that by shifting them we only shifted stones. The magic remains in the sacred ground of the original setting and can never be transplanted. At the edge of the monument they are shooting the feature film, *Death on the Nile*, using large wind machines to blow up the sand. Our small film crew looks ridiculous next to the feature film get up. News got around that the famous Lawrence Durrell is here. In the meal break Mia Farrow and Lois Chiles come and join us to share our picnic. Larry, always pleased with any female company, is especially excited being photographed with the stars.

Aswan, 6th November 1977

I am filming the interview which I hope to use for the opening and the ending of the film. Just as well that I kept it for now. Larry is totally changed, lucid and interesting. He looks marvellous in a pale blue fisherman's smock:

DURRELL: I have to confess that I am terribly incurious. It sounds silly, but I am extremely incurious, and my real life seems to pass either in books or in dreams. And if I weren't pushed, I don't think I would have moved from A to B. Had the Germans not pushed me, I would never have moved from Greece. Pity, because look what I would have missed.

PETER ADAM: Does the passage of time alter your attitude towards a place?

DURRELL: It's a convention—look how we use it. "Time stood still," "it went by in a flash," it's the same time. Here we feel the time's Nile time, Nile time rising in the bloodstream and sinking again with the rising and sinking of the Nile tide.

At night we sit on the terrace talking a long time about his books. He plans to write a book about Provence. When I suggest that he publish four novels, as he did with the *Quartet*, he says "You can't repeat

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that. This sort of thing only happens once." Then he pronounces the words I have been waiting for all those weeks, "I am glad I came along. I need this kick in the pants to get me out of myself and sort myself out. Now I can return, I gave up smoking, I am off drink." And this evening he believed it.

Luxor, 7th November 1977

We travel by bus to Luxor. The trip takes the whole day, only interrupted from time to time by us getting out and filming. We listen to strains of Sibelius's Third Symphony. We film the sunset on the Nile, which is so beautiful that one is almost afraid to capture it on film. It is too much of a postcard setting, a dilemma we have encountered so often during the last two weeks.

Luxor, 8th November 1977

We stay at the Winter Palace. Larry clowns around with our assistant, Ann Hummel. They have become really good friends. When we all go to visit the monuments, Larry is marvellously irreverential:

This is only one of the instances where Rameses has gone to town. His inordinate self-love and the way he peppered this whole area with monuments to himself and his exploits suggests somebody who is over-compensating. It is possible that he was excessively timid. Or perhaps the whole thing is a fraud. At any rate, the monumental type of architecture is awe-inspiring in its heaviness. But it's depressing also in its lack of variety, in its lack of give. And in some of these institutional-type buildings one feels they're really just about good enough to cash a traveller's cheque in.

And also, I think, in the sculpture, which is so institutional, so heavy, it's not entirely due to the use of material, but that these people were much more interested in finding the ideal state than they were in finding an ideal arrangement between the ego and the heavens. They were not really metaphysicians, they were law-givers.

Larry proudly bargains two necklaces from ten pounds down to three. We are all beginning to look forward to going home now. Travelling in groups and the constant presence of other people, even in the best of times, takes its toll.

Luxor, 9th November 1977

The telegramme arrives from London announcing the death of my friend, the painter Keith Vaughan. Larry's reaction is warm. None of

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the conventional consolation business. We talk about death and about suicide in particular. I am again struck by the enormous discrepancy in his nature. Could this man who now so soothingly speaks to me be the same who behaved often like a spoiled child? We are friends now, I think, if this is not too presumptuous. At night he embraces me and thanks me once more for this "useful and wonderful time." He looks marvellous. He has lost weight and is alert and cheerful. We seem to be years away from the lonely, sad figure, slumped over the bar in Alexandria.

Cairo, 10th November 1977

Last day of filming. We film a poor peasant house standing on a little river. The friendly owners have put all their belongings—a rug and a bench—outside in order that we are comfortable. Without one word of common language between them, Larry chats and laughs with the Arab family. It is good to take this last picture with us:

PETER ADAM: All your characters have a central experience. Have you a central experience in your life?

DURRELL: Ideally all experience is central. The problem is how to centralize it, and that is the problem of life itself.

PETER ADAM: None of your novels deals with the present time, why is that?

DURRELL: There is no such thing.

PETER ADAM: What do you mean?

DURRELL: Well, I mean that the present in which we live and act is an absolute illusion. We are phantoms really. And perhaps it's only when we're asleep or in our dreams that we realise the fact. But it's terribly insubstantial, and the way you put the question suggests to me that you took the books to be a report on quotidian reality, which is what they were trying to undermine. They were trying to create precariousness, insecurity, precisely about that. Because underneath the whole problem there was another question which was agitating me very much: how to undo the hooks and eyes of the ego. Because also using modern science I put into question that the whole question of the stability of the ego . . . Are we really the stable ego, as we think we are, or do we exist like old bits of cinema film—flap, flap, flap, 28 frames per second? And that also creates the precariousness which is part of the message—if you can use such an ugly word for such a pretty book!

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PETER ADAM: Do you think that ultimately history and politics are of no great consequence?

DURRELL: It is of no importance whatsoever, because it's continuously going on. History is the endless repetition of the wrong way of living, and it'll start again tomorrow. If it's moved from here today. So it's a total waste of time for anybody who is seriously engaged in the notion that life is terribly brief and that one should try and catch every scrap of wind in order to form oneself, so that death means something—that you're really used up when you die.

Peter Adam, 1977

From Lawrence Durrell's Notes:

I was relieved to have my feelings reassured by this visit. The terrifying thing about film-making is that one has to work against Egypt, because it is so damned beautiful, so extravagant, that everywhere one puts up a camera one is in danger of the picture postcard. But a film can catch that wonderful feeling of stillness that Egypt always conveys: the slow, green blood-time of the Nile. We have such an album of pictures, and I realise that the still image is not comparable with the moving one, because the camera is actually photographing time passing. All this, of course, constitutes distress which directors must feel, as opposed to what writers feel.

Lawrence Durrell and John Hawkes: Passages from a Dialogue at Pennsylvania State University

HAWKES: I would like to say something like "Welcome back!" The reason I can say that is because I think I might know something that some of us might not know, which is that the last time Lawrence Durrell was in the United States was approximately ten years ago. He went to the West Coast to see Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller. Would you tell us about it, please, Larry?

DURRELL: Well, I had a stroke of luck. I had an invitation to do the Mellon Lectures at Cal Tech in California. And looking it up on the map, I discovered it was about twenty kilometers from where Miller was living and about thirty from where Anaïs was living. Since I hadn't seen them for about seven years, I guess, it was an opportunity to spend two months in close proximity to them, and to see quite a lot of them. My employers were deeply civilized people, and they rejoiced in this fact as much as I did, when I explained to them my enthusiasm in accepting the job. They arranged for my duties to finish around noon, so that I got into my little stick-shift car, and I found myself chez Miller, who would be busy cooking lunch. So, instead of looking at the scenery or any of the glories of the arrangement, we spent practically every day for two months boozing and talking indefinitely until after midnight.

Anaïs also lived quite close, with her second husband. She always reminded me of the British Navy's adage, "A girl in every port, and a port in every girl." (Laughter) Anaïs had a tendency to have a husband in every port. Among the charming husbands was Rupert Pole who was then helping her edit her work, and she had already begun to start a

¹ On Miracle Ground IV: The Fourth International Lawrence Durrell Conference featured a public conversation on 12 April 1986 between Durrell and Hawkes. This conversation was silently edited by Michael H. Begnal.

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long period of illness which terminated in her death. But she was still in pretty good fettle and physically shored up by this wonderful love affair with Rupert Pole, and sufficiently game to come and help me with my lectures. Of course, she charmed the whole world immediately, and my lectures swelled from about thirty students to three or four hundred every time they knew she was coming.

I also got Henry to come one afternoon and chat up the students. All this helped my prestige enormously. I had a most enjoyable stay, although I didn't learn very much about America, naturally, but I learned all about the availability of drink and food in that region, that hospitable region.

But the reason I was holding off this afternoon, Jack, I'm conscious of the fact that for me you're the senior stylist in American writing. It was rather calculated to make you, perhaps, reveal a few wrinkles of the mysteries of your manner of writing. I was thinking that the whole problem of writers is that we are preaching from a privileged position, and that writing isn't sufficiently precise to actually encompass the reality with which we are trying to deal. So we are forced to be incoherent and to exclaim, but we never get any nearer to the center. With a lucky stroke, perhaps, in a striking metaphor or a poem, we can provoke a little thrill of intuition and share that sensation of the special reality, a special order, special feel, with the reader, which is the object, I think, of the chase, isn't it? We have to try to find ways of discerning what this reality we are trying to describe is about. The Chinese aphorisms, of course, get much nearer to it, I think, than we Europeans—the Indian and Chinese. I am reminded of an American child's description of a fishing net as a lot of holes tied together with string. (Laughter)

HAWKES: Larry said he loved language. And Larry, you wanted to know what I thought about language. The only thing we really care about, which is what you describe as inadequate, is the word. We think we're going to talk about metaphor, but I'd like to ask you a question about Henry Miller first, so we'll get back to it. When and where did you and Henry Miller first meet?

DURRELL: In Paris, in 1937. Penniless. By then the war was already starting, and he was ordered back to the States by the consulate, but he came to Greece instead.

HAWKES: And you were there?

DURRELL & HAWKES: DIALOGUE AT PENN STATE

DURRELL: I came from Greece. I had been living in Corfu with my family and other animals.

HAWKES: Have you ever in your life written and published a book, and some years later, not right away, and certainly not while you were writing it, suddenly realize that you couldn't have written that book of yours if somebody else hadn't written another book first? Has that ever happened to you?

DURRELL: No. To you?

HAWKES: It did. Honestly, it did.

DURRELL: Which was the book? The Bible?

HAWKES: No. My novel *Second Skin* has haunted me all my life until now—because it seemed I couldn't equal it. After *Second Skin* and seven years, I wrote *The Blood Oranges*. About a week ago, Sophie was reading aloud from *Livia*, and I thought of *Justine*. It had first appeared in a hardback edition in 1957, and Sophie was smart enough to get it through a book club; otherwise we never would have had it. So I went to the attic, got it, looked at the first paragraph, and said, "God Almighty, I've just learned something. I couldn't have written either one of those books, but especially *The Blood Oranges*, had Lawrence Durrell not written everything he's written." So I had an experience.

DURRELL: Are you sad or happy?

HAWKES: Happy. Wouldn't you have been? Wouldn't you be, if you were me?

DURRELL: Among a list of things, your generosity is marvelous. Come to think of it, it did happen to me. In the public toilet of Corfu one afternoon, I discovered *Tropic of Cancer*. It had been thrown away by a disgusted tourist, and I fished it out and saw that it was published in English in Paris. The first three pages riveted me. I had that premonitory thrill one always has when one comes face to face with a work of genius, and I suddenly realized the sort of wavelength Henry was on, and that all this apparent filth was really therapy. And I couldn't have written *The Black Book*, had I not been deeply wound around his little finger by his performance in *Tropic of Cancer*. During that year I wrote to him, a simple little fan-letter postcard saying, "Thank you very much for a marvelous book." I didn't expect a reply, but I got a letter back and we started corresponding. He asked me if I'd go to Paris and meet him. When I did, he and Anaïs Nin met us at the

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station. Truth to tell, I would never have been able to write *The Black Book* had I not been in a public urinal in Corfu in 1935. (Laughter) I had forgotten that completely, but it's true. He invented me in a certain manner. But this, of course, I learned afterwards from Yoga, is natural, because it's a transmission. One creates and recreates other people and is in turn recreated by them. It's an exchange of wavelengths. This is a beastly job we have of transmitting and transmission. Do you agree that language is inadequate, and that's why we get so angry?

HAWKES: That's why we're looking into each other's eyes, because eye contact is the only honest form of intimacy.

DURRELL: Yes, we're all looking for that sacred wiggle. (Laughter)

HAWKES: You're the only one who's got it. (Laughter) Do you want to talk about the imagination?

DURRELL: No. I feel superstitious about it. I feel that the current will be cut off if one tries to be too conceptual about it, too rational, to enunciate it too clearly. I fear we might lose it altogether. Don't you ever have that superstitious feeling that the current isn't working today, and "Oh, Christ, is it ever going to come back?" Surely, you must! I think we all do, no? When you're writing, when you're in mid-smash, right up at the net?

HAWKES: I don't play tennis. (Laughter) If anybody asks me, "How do you write a book?" I pause and think it's an absurd question. And then I look them in the eye, and I say how I write a book. It's impossible to do, but I can do it.

DURRELL: I believe in being as sincere as you can be without losing money. (Laughter)

HAWKES: Are you a romantic?

DURRELL: Yes, but we're not sentimentalists.

HAWKES: That's a really serious statement that Larry made, because he and I are, I'll say it, romantic poets who write prose as well. I think your first book that is extraordinary is *Bitter Lemons*, which I consider a fiction. Lots of people would take it as a personal account—I think it's fiction. I think everything you've written is non-fiction and fiction. I think they're the same, and *Bitter Lemons* is a truly great book.

DURRELL: Hurry on, in case somebody contradicts. (Laughter) I tried to do it as consciously as possible, and tried to use the elements of ethos,

DURRELL & HAWKES: DIALOGUE AT PENN STATE

the Freudianism and existentialism which came out of the *Quartet*, to use the elements of our science and our psychology—because it seemed to me that one couldn't do anything that was contemporary leaving out those tremendous insights of Freud, the disturbance of the observed field by the observer, for example, which is particularly astonishing. It's silly to imagine that the novelist or the poet is not affected by the science or the ethos of his day. After all, Lawrence wrote the first Freudian novel in *Sons and Lovers*. Through Frieda, I suppose, the gossip of Vienna soaked through, and he got a rough working knowledge. He had a very mysteriously distorted knowledge of psychoanalysis, but it served for the first psychoanalytic novel [*Lady Chatterley's Lover*]. Its subtitle was "tenderness," by the way, which is not a bad thing—Constance, you see. I meant it was a chime for my Constance, too, to carry on the thread. Because he was on the right side, don't you think?

HAWKES: Chime, charm, integrity, tender smile. I couldn't at the moment tell you what an aphorism is, but I can tell you the difference between sequence and sequel. It's really because I couldn't keep the two words apart when I saw them. It's just that, of course, a sequence means a work, without which several other works that have to adjoin it in one way or another so that they're all connected, couldn't really exist because the author hasn't planned that far. So there are sequences, a unit; it is in a sense unfinished. But a sequel is an absolutely different perspective, and I'm quoting Durrell, a sequel is a different look at the whole thing. And that's why *The Avignon Quintet* is, as a matter of fact, not finished, because it's really the sequence to *The Alexandria Quartet* which he claimed was finished with the final or fourth book. It was not actually. That means that he has to keep working, though he will deny it, but he will keep working because *The Avignon Quintet* is not finished. He's going to write another book.

DURRELL: All this is Quinxology. (Laughter)

Provence Entire?

Chapter One

BY LAWRENCE DURRELL

The original title for this book when first Aldo described it to me had a certain comforting insolence; but of course when I came to examine the historical data which was available I realised that to do anything with pretensions to completeness would require a dozen volumes. I suggested something of more modest dimensions, but which nevertheless could try to capture by a technique of *collage* the poetic quiddity of this extraordinary land. Provence! What was it exactly? For many of the topics I was indebted to the idle conversations of my two first friends, Jerome the tramp and Aldo the vine-dresser. And while time and circumstance have separated us, theirs is the constant presence without which no poetic evocation of Provence could be for me possible. Thanks to them (I see them loafing about among the olives, glass in hand, full of scarlet Fitou) I can honestly say that I have experienced the country with my feet as well as with my mind. Long walks and longer potations characterised my researches—the ideal way to gain access to a landscape full of ambiguities and secrets. Yes, secrets black with wine and gold with honey, landscapes of an almost brutal serenity piled one upon another with quixotic profusion, as if to provoke the historic confrontations which made them significant, muddling up the sacred and the profane, the trivial and the grandiose, with operatic richness, mesmerising one!

This is the opening passage from an illustrated book now tentatively titled *Caesar's Ghost* to be published by Faber and Faber, © Lawrence Durrell, 1987. All rights reserved. Published with the permission of the author and of Curtis Brown Ltd.

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The *mazet* is the country cottage of the land, usually the dependency of a *mas* (the word itself is the diminutive of *mas*). And when first I set foot in Provence one could buy such a habitation very cheaply. Happily, for we were poor—the common history of writers. Therefore the tiny *mazet* we bought a few kilometres outside Nîmes afforded us little more than an elementary shelter from the elements. But with industry and hard thinking we transformed it rapidly into a comfortable, indeed snug, cottage. I encircled it with freestone walls, using the simple garrigue stone which flakes and trims into convenient soup-plate sizes, ideal for walls and balconies. I set this off with a small patio, the girdles of stone setting off the venerable almond trees to perfection. Here we lounged away the golden afternoons and evenings like three Chinese philosophers, debating endlessly the hypothetical book which we knew would never be written—the book which contained the essential insights about the place. A compendium of poetic inklings—all that the ideal tourist should know! What overweening ambition! Yet we saw the shape of the book reflected in the black wine we drank!

Yet Provence as a subject for either a guide or a companion presented certain problems of organisation which became obvious the moment one tackled the historical panorama, for so much has already been written, and marvellously well, about the place. Indeed there is no aspect of the subject which cannot boast a salient book in French. Or was there room for something new to be said on the subject?

To begin with it seemed to be less of a geographical entity than an idea—it was Caesar, after all, who christened it “The Province,” and at first its shifting contours expanding and contracting in response to wars and migrations seemed to encompass a landmass which included Geneva on the one hand and Toulouse on the other, an improbably vast territory. But it did not stay stable in the face of history, and slowly it hovered and sank until it assumed the outlines of our modern Provence which comprises Montélimar in the north, Nice in the east and Béziers in the south . . .

This modern version of this semi-mythical country is roughly what the modern traveller encounters when he strikes directly south from Valence. (The sudden thrill and shock of olive country.) The Mediterranean suddenly begins to assert itself and the traditional Provençal folklore, the old tourist keyboard, is there with cypresses and warm tiled roofs, with ivy and honeysuckle, sycamore and serene dappled planes tracing the course of secret rivers hollowed out by the

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steady drive of Swiss glaciers in their descent to the sea. The Rhone! But nothing can do justice to the light—neither camera nor brush. It has a felicity and eloquence beyond all praise. These skies—the special wounded blue one finds sometimes in Mantegna's skies—they tell one at once that such skies are unique to Provence, for they are neither Greek nor Roman. They seem so freshly minted that the peasant faces you encounter in the Saturday market-place have the poise and gravity of Roman medallions.

But within the last fifteen years everything has been changed, all history has been compromised by the deliberate policy of transforming the backward sections of Provence into tourist playgrounds of a sophistication to match Nice and Monte Carlo. To this end handsome motorways have been thrown down to replace the modest secondary roads of the past—inadequate for modern traffic; while in the south the rather disappointing seaside towns and beaches have been transformed into a ragged winterland of skyscrapers—a playground for the northern tourists on whom now the economy of the country has come largely to depend. Meanwhile the grave housing crisis which followed the late Algerian war has provided the peaceable Roman towns of Avignon, Nîmes, Montpellier with vast unwelcome dormitory suburbs and a wilderness of secondary roads which necessitate a whole new strategy on the part of the tourist who nevertheless still flocks to the Midi in search of the sun-drenched amenities promised by the guides. But it is obvious that the country is a funnel through which almost every race, ancient and modern, has marched either towards or away from a war; marched upon roads traced and defended by the bravery and enterprise of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Even this new tourist playground served by its pristine network of autoroutes still bears the imprint of their visitation. But today a whole new technique is needed to do what one once did by horse or bicycle (some obstinate Swiss and Germans still do) in order to examine the ancient sites which still star the land in all their poetic splendour. Paradoxically enough they are if anything somewhat less accessible than in the past. So much for progress! The motor-car has swallowed us whole!

I recall one dramatic occasion when I came into Provence from the north with autumn well on the way, driving into a countryside exhausted but replete after a successful harvest of grapes.

The vineyards were stripped already, and the burly little crucifixes of vines had already responded to a freak snowfall with all their

charcoal blackness and their withered forms . . . They had their feet in snow. Nothing more to expect, one felt, until spring came round again with the first secret green leaves.

The tiny village of Lauret offered me two striking tableaux, its roofs snow-capped despite bright sunlight. Before one house the owner had set out a table with a white cloth and a solitary bottle and glass to show that he was prepared to serve the traveller a *table d'hôte* from his own table for a modest price. The bottle of rosy Pic St-Loup had the corkscrew standing in the cork. The primal eloquence of the new wine setting up animal thirsts in the passers by! At the other end of the village there had been a death, and outside the front door of a similar style of house stood another table also clothed in white on which stood the traditional book to be signed as a mark of sympathy by the mourners and friends of the deceased. The candle dripped on to the white tablecloth. The contrast with the white snowscape was striking, the juxtaposition of the two tables fearfully congruent—symbolic of what Provence stood for in terms of human destiny, Mediterranean destiny, linking in one mood the messages carried by ancient Greece and Rome alike.

But the best way to strike up an acquaintance with one of these Provençal towns is to arrive around daybreak, preferably on a market day when the place is full of sleepy vendors unloading their vans and trucks of everything you can imagine—from pigeons and hams to olives and plums. The whole town seems to be stretching and yawning and waiting for the sunrise to warm it up. Only the early morning *bistrots* are open but there is many a lesson to be learned for the market people are specialists in the early morning nip—a swift stab of some neat alcohol to set the wheels of commerce turning. In the smoking bistrot you will observe certain elderly traders who greet the dawn with a classic glass of *marc* or cherry brandy or port or a *canon* of red wine. Or perhaps others will only settle for a caressing dose of Armagnac or pepper vodka . . . In my own case I recall an ancient visit with Jerome which was made memorable by the discovery of a singular drink called Arquebus which he claimed was harmless yet agreeable. I was given a full wineglass of this product which looked somewhat like vodka or gin. The morning was a trifle fresh. I somewhat imprudently drained it. When I picked myself up off the floor I asked politely if I might examine the bottle in which this prodigious firewater was delivered to the world. The letterpress which accompanied the drink was highly suggestive. It informed me that what I had just tasted was not an alcohol but, strictly speaking, a “vulnerary” which had been invented in the Middle Ages

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for use on the battlefields. The recent invention of the Arquebus had had a marked effect on warfare, causing a new type of flesh wound, more grievous than the wounds known in the past from ordinary arrows. The doctors of the day welcomed the invention of this stanching and cleansing "vulnerary." But at some point (the bottle does not say when or how) somebody must have sucked his bandage, and from then on there was no looking back; Arquebus found its place among the more powerful firewaters available to man, ordinary man, and indeed a comfort to all humanity. It appears to be a specific for everything except receding hair and I know a number of people who swear by it, and always keep a bottle in the larder in order to save lives when need be. This is the kind of information one gathers if one gets up early enough and arrives with the first dawnlight in a Provençal town. As for Arquebus it does not seem to be widely known even today. Your friends will be delighted to be introduced to it even though it is only a humble vulnerary and not a real drink at all.

I recall another occasion which I found somewhat unexpected and disconcerting, but which seemed rather typical of meridional procedures. It turns upon the enigmatic behavior of a somewhat introspective looking individual sitting alone in a secluded corner of a popular bistrot; the waiter began a prolonged handout of free doses of Armagnac to all and sundry—a most welcome act of generosity on a somewhat chilly morning. Moreover no sooner was one glass emptied than another appeared in its place and it was clear that if we were not careful we would be in for a prolonged binge. I had of course read all about meridional hospitality to strangers and dutifully toasted my host by raising my glass before draining it. But when the second glass appeared and it became clear that there would be more to follow I became intrigued enough to wonder what he could be celebrating in such exemplary fashion. (I adore Armagnac, but I was also at the wheel of the car that day.) But I could not resist asking the waiter who the gentleman in the corner was, and what he was celebrating. "Has he won the lottery or broken the bank at the Casino?" The waiter shook his head and said: "Much better than that. He has been a martyr for years to a most persistent tapeworm. He has tried everything without avail. But today the head came away and he passed it. *Ça se fête n'est ce pas?*"

If one happens to be visiting the city during one of the major festivals of the calendar—something like the harvest festival, say, one will see the full splendour of the ancient monuments and with luck a cockade-snatching bullfight in the Roman arena—this superb stone playpen of antiquity. The Romans regarded this type of public

entertainment as forming a whole part of civic crowd control. Bread and circuses . . . It sounds a trifle cynical to our ears but our modern politicians are just as lucid when the elections come round. Mob-control is an art, and everyone is not a Caesar unfortunately.

It is worth stressing also that for the modern inhabitant of the Midi the Roman experience as expressed in these monumental relics is active and contemporary and not just a question of mortuary remains attesting to a grandiose past; these fine remains are still in active use for festivals and ceremonies and form part of the rich tapestry of civic life. The tourist tends to see them as referring to the past while to the modern inhabitant of Arles or Nîmes they occupy the whole stage of a vivid and colourful present. The arenas are open air theatres capable of accommodating visiting stage companies or orchestras or any other type of civic celebration. And what a setting for them!

The numerous festivals and recitals of all kinds provide frequent surprises, some of them most gratifying. For example I recall being urged to attend a performance of *Holiday On Ice* in the Nîmes arena (very popular this yearly visitation of this superb company of ice-skating champions from Canada and the USA). I discovered that they had flooded the arena in true Roman fashion and frozen it into a skating rink. The performance, beautifully lit and orchestrated, was literally breath-taking in its beauty; and to see this on a moonlit night in August in such a setting was downright moving! I had forgotten that the original construction had allowed for sea-battles—the whole arena was turned into a lake on such occasions. I had only remembered the disagreeable orgies of bloodlust which provided the standard variety of entertainment for the general public in the ages of Roman primacy. There are some tremendous massacres on the records and it is not possible to read about them without feeling that the Romans had a streak of vicious callousness in their make-up. Gladiatorial combat is one thing but feeding helpless captives or slaves to wild animals in order to relish their distress, that is something else. It is more than likely that the Greeks felt a twinge of distress, of disgust, at the weight of Roman philistinism and the crudeness with which these brutal spectacles were played out before an audience of ordinary citizens. It threw into relief the markedly different life-styles of the Romans and the Greeks—illustrated from the outset by the sharply differing syntax of Latin and Greek. The Roman temper was at the base juridical and moralistic—strong on jurisprudence and the codification of civic morals. The Greek was less exact but more profound. The theatre productions and their plays emphasized this radical difference of bent. The Greek production

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was anxious about human identity face to face with God or with the bias of nature—a whole community could purge itself of its fears at one and the same time. The absolution was in the catharsis. The Roman strength was in its investigation of right and wrong, of destiny and history. It was anchored firmly in time and in the circumstantial. It breathed all the idealism of a perfected civic code. It investigated right and wrong with fidelity and poetic felicity. But they were two different codes, two different ways of looking at human history and the contemporary reality. Provence has enjoyed both styles of mind, both types of sensibility.

They are still very much in evidence today, they still live on in parodies of their ancient selves: I am thinking of the two radically different forms of bullfight, the *mis à mort* of the Spanish vein against the fervent and vivacious cockade-snatching variety of fight which is Provençal.

There are only a few real treasures of ancient architecture left in Arles—it has suffered terribly from the repeated vandalism inflicted by conquering armies. Of the theatre, built under Augustus, hardly a stitch is left in terms of the original. It doesn't somehow matter for the site is infinitely touching and nostalgic in its beauty. While those who wish to savour the atmosphere of the modern town and its inhabitants will take time off to have a cigarette and a drink in the famous Boulevard des Lices with its wide pavements and comfortable cafés, its shady corners sheltered by tall planes with their dappled leaves.

But for my money the most graphically beautiful place in Arles, and the most atmospheric, is the extraordinary necropolis known now as the Alyscamps, a relic of pagan times which remained intact owing to the belief that Christ himself appeared there while the first Christian bishop was consecrating it and appropriating it for Christian burial. Christ knelt to bless the spot and you may still see the marks left by his knees in the rock. The bishop who first brought Christianity to Arles was the celebrated Saint Trophime, a Greek. A little chapel has been built around the sacred spot which is known, appropriately enough, as La Genouillade (built 1529). It is a spot so shady and delightful that it compels the imagination even though one walks down avenues lined with stone sarcophagi. It radiates harmony and peace unlike most modern cemeteries, and is an ideal spot for a picnic, with its green lawns shaded by trees and littered with tombs. At its entry is the Arc de St Césaire which somehow sets the tone for the necropolis beyond. It has had an extraordinary history. For a long time it was the most coveted burial ground for Christians in all Europe; it was enough to float a corpse

down the Rhone in its coffin for it to be fished out when it reached Arles and carried to the Alyscamps for formal burial. Of course one had to include the statuary fee with it to ensure its safe disposal. But this convention held good for centuries and the richness of the decorations on the stone sarcophagi was proverbial. Its reputation, however, began to wane after the body of St Trophime was removed in 1152 and the town officials fell into bad ways—such as offering the beautifully carved stone sarcophagus-lids as civic gifts to distinguished visitors! Then in 1848 the railway put in an appearance and swallowed up a large corner of this magical ancient burial-place. But even the part that escaped has a wonderful valedictory atmosphere, and I have had the luck to visit it on numerous occasions at differing times of day or of seasons of the year. It never changes even though it has so obviously been pillaged of its noblest tombs. It is unique in its charm.

One could not plead in such terms for the Palace of Constantine though its interest is compelling in the historic sense—for it has been inhabited by Visigoth, Ostrogoth and Frankish kings in turn as well as the Kings of Arles and the Emperors of Germany when they came down here to crown the said Kings of Arles. Lastly, too, by the Comtes de Provence . . . But let us leave history to the histories which have been admirably compiled. This account is necessarily partial and particular rather than comprehensive; it is an attempt to deal with echoes and atmospheres.

Apart from the fine museums I must not forget to at least indicate the presence of two jewels of the romanesque—though they belong to the Christian experience and not the Roman. I am thinking of the unique cloisters of the fine church of St Trophime, as well as its marvellously intricate decorations for the great portals which are the purest music of the carver's skill. But these items will tend to group themselves in the tourist's mind with the equally glorious façade of the St Gilles church which shares its celebrity, and also perhaps the Christian experience which it might be possible to centre upon Avignon.

As for the ordinary citizenry of Arles, it prides itself on the purity of its origins and its unbroken descent—as witness the reputation of its female beauty. But long before the Romans there was unquestionably a Gaulish settlement on the site, as witness the early Keltic name *Ar-larh* or “moist habitation.” This was seemingly occupied by Greeks—and the original race comprised Greek and Gaulish strains combined. Then in B.C. 46 a Roman colony was planted on the site. Caesar decided that he must pay off his debts of gratitude to the officers and men of his

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armies in the time-honoured fashion, with gifts of land. He ordered Claudius Tiberius Nero, one of his quaestors, father and grandfather of the Emperors Tiberius, Claudius and Caligula to lead two expeditions into Provence and take up a colonial station at Narbonne and at Arles. This was therefore one of the first military colonies to be planted outside the frontiers of Italy.

The mission of this Tiberius was to portion out the land equitably among Caesar's veterans of the Sixth Legion—some six thousand officers and men. The ensuing settlement was christened *Arelate Sexantorum*. We are lucky to have from the pen of Tacitus a description of the procedure to be followed on such occasions. After the tribunes and the centurions came a cloud of minor officials called *agrimensores* or surveyors who undertook the technical side of things—the actual parcelling out of the sites among the newcomers. Hard on their heels followed a hierarchy of civil officers, religious, judicial or administrative, all under the direction of an administrator-general who bore the title *curator coloniae*. From that moment onwards the transformation of the little colony into a little Rome was a matter only of time! In next to no time the new arrivals set about building a capitol, a forum, temples, triumphal arches, aqueducts, markets—and in the longer term theatres, a circus, public baths. In a very few years the outward aspect of Arles was brought into line with the Roman life-style of its founders. A mercantile city of Graeco-Gauls had become Latinised, bureaucratic, and flattered itself that it was cast in the image of the new parent on the Tiber. It even got itself rechristened as *Gallula Roma*, *Arelas* (The Rome of Gaul). What we see today is a far cry from the flourishing colonies which left their print upon the manners and character of this mixture of lawless tribes; their slow deterioration, their spoliation is heart-rending to contemplate. I am reminded of a passage in Lenthéric which is worth quoting in full—it concerns the plundering of the *Alyscamps*. "All the museums of the south of France possess tombs stolen from the *Alyscamps*. As for the monolithic tombs, they were abandoned to any one who cared to have them and for many centuries have been regarded as stones ready quarried for use. The city of Arles has on several occasions had the culpable condescension of giving up the tombs of its ancestors to the princes and great men of the world; Charles IX loaded several ships with them—which sank in the Rhone at Pont St Esprit. The Duke of Savoy, the Duke of Lorraine, the Cardinal Richelieu, and a hundred others have taken away just what they liked, and Arles today has hardly more to show of this vast cemetery than one avenue—but a noble one—of sarcophagi and some fragments

of fine Gothic or Romanesque chapels lost in the midst of a desert." Yet despite this calamitous catalogue of misadventures Arles still bears itself proudly, still glows with life.

The gradual disintegration of the pagan world—the replacement of polytheism with its rich tapestry of nymphs and goddesses and other deities by the more rigidly functional monotheism of the Judeo-Christian style—was a long and slow business. You can follow out its history through the long list of bishops and other religious worthies who figure in the history of the town. They are not all of equal interest, though some of the stories about the miracles they caused are richly fanciful and not without humour. But for our purposes two are interesting. St Trophime is said now to be a Greek or at least an Asiatic and to be the apostle who accompanied St Paul and is mentioned in Acts 20.4. The other figure of note is St Virgil of Arles who consecrated Augustine for his mission to Kent to bring the good news to the Angles.

Anciently, in historic times, Arles, which lies near the apex of a triangle formed by the sheltering branches of the Rhone, was bathed on one side by the river by which she received merchandise from the north, and on the other side by the lagoons (the Keltic word is *lôn* or *lyn*) with their submerged land which extended to the sea. When the famous general Marius (of whom we have more to relate) had connected up these lagoons with his strategic canal, Arles found that it could import and export merchandise destined for the whole Mediterranean. It is worth noting that the Greek and Roman cities of the coast are not sited on the actual coast, on the river bars, but on the lagoons which were deep then and afforded safe anchorage for merchant ships. These lagoons through which both fresh and salt water flowed were always healthy in classical times; but wind and wave and alluvium tend to block their seaward mouths and convert the place into stagnating marshland exhaling malaria. During the Middle Ages no attention was paid to this fact and these stations which had been perfectly wholesome in the Classic Epoch were rendered pestilential and the cities dwindled in size to clusters of fever-smitten hovels. In Roman times the Camargue was a second Egypt, for the whole of its twenty thousand acres was regularly inundated by the Rhone. It was called "The Granary of the Roman Army" while flourishing little Arles was designated "The Breasts," so abounding in plenty was she supposed to be. But the situation deteriorated steadily and it was Louis XIV who finally called for an engineering survey of the region which resulted in the decision to strengthen the Rhone embankments. Recently, surveys suggest that

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this was not the answer to the problem and the whole matter is under discussion at a high government level.

Provence is not really a place! It is not really a separate entity with boundaries, and a separate, self-realised soul as, say, Switzerland is. It is a beautiful metaphor born of Caesar's impatience with a geographical corridor stacked with the ruins of a hundred cultures, a hundred nations and tribes, a hundred armies. The capricious rivers which scribbled its surface over often flooded and inhibited the free movement of regiments and of trade caravans alike. The Roman roads when they came did much to render the place coherent and to clarify the prevailing doctrine and predisposition of the country's inner being, its true soul, which could be summed up by the word dissent. It is bold, of course, to use such phrases, for one runs the danger of being thought to be fantasising, but even a brief residence here will convince that if much of the historical side of Provence seems often paradoxical it is because of the overlay of different cultures which are all slowly conforming to the genius of the place but at different speeds. The most powerful and the most consistent, like the Roman, have left more relics through which we can decipher their life style, but it is only an overlay, for under them we find Greek relics and Saracen, while even the modern shepherds offer us Stone Age echoes in their habits. It is what has remained obstinately constant and apparently ineradicable that strikes you as time goes by. The long roots stretch back into Greek and Roman history, and of course through these great channels into the Mediterranean world as a cultural epic form—a masterpiece of realised memory. It is more emblematic than metaphoric, more poetry than prose! And in the heart of its historic change lies a continuity and consistence which shows the pious strength of these hills and rivers to bend man and shape him into an original thoughtform—the place expressing itself through his body and mind as surely as a sculptor expresses himself in the clay he works or the stone he carves. One can believe in Caesar and Mistral as spiritual co-evals and in the whole tapestry of its tempestuous history as all being appropriate, all belonging right here and nowhere else.

After all, even in such remote epochs as the age of Pythagoras there are records of contact with the Druids in Britain, and of an exchange of religious and philosophic ideas. And the Roman ruins of, say, Orange seem to echo as if in stony parody those of Epidauros, though how different Greek theatre is from Roman. The tellurian heart-beat of a place is recorded in these stone experiences. In the marbles of the Acropolis you can read the eloquent stone echo evolved by Rome in

Provence, the sweet Maison Carré of Nîmes which still carries the code of place, the blood-stroke of Greece's brilliant insight into human unhappiness and the problems of the evolved identity—all this filtered through the Roman wish to excel the race which made them feel aesthetically *parvenus*, which of course they were in terms of their coarseness of vision. Yet there are surprises for us even here, for even a functional artifact like the Pont du Gard is so huge in conception that its magniloquence is the equal of Westminster Abbey. But we must remember that it was dedicated to water, and water was a God. While even today in the streets of Arles you will find in the blazing beauty of an Arlesienne a Roman echo in flesh. As for the Pont du Gard the best description is by Rousseau. It took a great deal to shut a man like him up, but the emergence of this mastodon from the featureless *garrigues* which house the spring which feeds it deprived him of coherent speech so uncanny did it seem. It is the size of course, as well as the realisation that the whole construct is slotted together in pieces of honey-coloured stone without the help of mortar. Each individual block is the size of a motor-car! How did the Roman engineers manage to raise these vast chunks so high into the air?

But water was precious, water was life, and the Roman was uxorious to a fault about land and its fruits. Provence signified something like a metaphor for married plenty!

Thus the Roman experience feeds back into the Greek and vice versa and the sensitive observer can take the measure of both and glory in them separately, for each culture brought with it the fruit of original insight and a creative distress which still echoes on in these stone remains. In 1837 Stendhal in a brief jotting recorded his admiration for the blithe purity of the Maison Carré in the following words. "The overall effect is admirable. I have seen more imposing monuments in Italy itself but nothing as pretty as this pretty antique, even though rather overcharged with ornamental detail, which however doesn't exclude the beautiful. It's the smile of someone who is habitually serious." He had sensed something like the particular magic of an archetypal form expressing itself though a mere copy—the convention of a Roman studio. It was an aching reminiscence of a forgotten style of stone rapture which the formal and functional Roman lifestyle had overlaid and set aside.

Yet how obstinate the archetypal pattern is—it repeated itself in the gladiatorial stance of the wrestler or boxer, the equipoise of the dancer, the crafty and dissolute face of the Camargue gypsy, or the moronic and lustreless gaze of the toreador raised to virtual heroism as he strikes

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home. Not to mention such constants of place as the beauty of the Arles girls. The beauties look as if they had been freshly wished and love-minted to order.

The little Xmas *santons* of Provence with their butcher-baker-candlestick-maker preoccupations must echo the same concern with the persistence of archetypes through the different vocations. With the growth of universal prosperity and overpopulation, big changes must be on the way and we can already see the long shadow of urbanisation spelling out the death-sentence on the gypsies who brought so much colour and life to Provence. They are gradually forming into static caravan communities which will soon become first camp-sites and then villages. Their caravans have television, their children attend school . . . Their famous May festival at the Saintes Maries de la Mer is a shadow of its former self. At the time of writing (Sept 1986), there is even talk of changing the date because the football hooligans from Marseilles have taken to crowding out the fair which accompanies the religious fête and have twice vandalized the town in a smashup rampage worthy of the British.

Another avocation which seems under stress is that of the tramp. When first I arrived in Provence they were numerous and very much in evidence and indeed were made very welcome by the Provençals. I suppose they contained as a profession the statutory number of drunks and eccentrics and perhaps even criminal vagabonds capable of giving the police headaches. But *la cloche* enjoyed a sort of envious creative respect, as if the general public felt that these whiskered gentlemen were really at heart peripatetic philosophers who had opted out of ordinary society in order to make an almost religious retreat, perhaps to "redefine their deaths" while there was yet time. Secretly every one felt that to take to the road was an act of romantic glory and philosophic insight—and this may be correct. I remembered from my childhood in India something of the same attitude towards the *sadhu* or "holy man" who had taken to the jungle in search of a verifiable truth—with the desire to rediscover submission as a fine art and help it to become a corporate philosophy. Certainly when first I met Jerome he was sailing under these colours and enjoyed wide respect and many friends in the villages he frequented as a lettered man which he was, although only a humble house-painter! But he had friends of every colour who, like him, might do a day or two of carpentry or housepainting to make ends meet. But they were at heart solitaries. One of them lived in a tub in Avignon, and slept on straw like Diogenes. He had a commonplace

book in which he preserved stray thoughts and philosophic jottings which did not lack originality.

But while the outward and visible signs are there, the full state of institutionalised distress and ghastly regimentation that one finds in the bigger cities has not yet arrived. There is room for manoeuvre, and still plenty of space for those who enjoy wild hiking. The Cévennes which lie just north of Nîmes have been discovered long ago by the Germans and Swiss (most discreet of tourists), and anyone walking or motoring through the chestnut forests of the choicer *cévenol* landscapes will surely come upon them, usually in couples, trudging down from Le Vigan or Alès to Nîmes. It is encouraging to find that though they live in big modern cities eaten alive by the motor car they have not lost a taste for fresh air and green space around them—though one cannot say the same for many of the youthful Americans who follow in the wake of the jazz festival. The poor Provençals are agog with curiosity and dejection as they view in their handsome Roman cities these distressing hermaphrodites with no centres to their eyes swaying in peristaltic percussion to yowling catch-phrase music played by their unevolved peers from negroland. Nowadays, however, as often as not they can be French, for jazz is vastly popular and clearly here to stay. And you might as likely find in close harness jazz from Polynesia or Ghana or Finland . . . lovely big sulky heads with disabused eyes set in them like blazing *toc*—Finns!

Mercifully, too, whatever else has befallen Provence of late it has still remained a picnic land with weather to match, and here an excursion is really worthy of the name for one can be certain to come upon something original and local to eat or drink—the dressed olives of the coastal towns, the hundred or so varieties of cheese, not to mention the glorious range of wines and grogs, dressed meats and fruits. The little country fairs are numerous; one happens upon them usually by accident while looking for something else, a Roman monument or a Christian abbey or monastery. One of the great charms of this blessed land France is that food is treated as the great aesthetic experience it should be, and its careful preparation with an almost religious piety. These little trade fairs guarantee that the fruit fish vegetables are fresh for the table. And where will you find such a mania for roses? Never have I seen such a variety and splendour as the roses of Provence set out in the shadow of cool awnings—such beauty and such prolixity of different species! They deserve a book devoted to them—yet I have found none, at least in the local bookshops.

The only vexation, then, for the visitor is to discover with dismay

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that he has not enough time to do justice to all the country has to offer in the way of historic monuments; they are as numerous as they are various, but it is not possible to see everything of interest in Avignon or Nîmes or Arles in a brief package tour visit which lasts for only an afternoon. Each would require a minimum week or ten days to achieve a thorough feeling of familiarity. The ideal would be actual residence for a few weeks out of season but how many of us can hope for such a thing?

INTRODUCTION: THE ACHIEVEMENT OF LAWRENCE DURRELL

This is Lawrence Durrell's seventy-fifth year, and convention deems such anniversaries especially noteworthy; however, 1987 has a more than actuarial significance for Durrell. For one thing, *The Avignon Quintet*, completed in 1985, has already begun to draw scholarly attention. Durrell himself has encouraged the air of finality that surrounds his most ambitious novel sequence: he has announced that *The Avignon Quintet* will prove to be his last fiction. Evaluation and reevaluation seem especially timely. Various monographs and collections of essays appeared in the 1960s and 1970s; *Deus Loci*, first a newsletter and eventually a journal devoted to Durrell studies, has been published since 1977; and four international Durrell conferences with the collective title *On Miracle Ground*, sponsored by The Lawrence Durrell Society and held in 1980, 1982, 1984, and 1986, have produced a considerable body of material that either has been published or will soon appear in volumes of Proceedings. Durrell's oeuvre has most recently been covered in a collection edited by Alan Warren Friedman (*Critical Essays on Lawrence Durrell*), and other volumes are being arranged by Michael Begnal and Frank Kersnowski. Due to come out during 1988 and concentrating on Durrell the man are a volume of Durrell's letters to the French poet and editor Jean Fanchette, and a monograph on Durrell by his long-time friend, F.-J. Temple. The present volume is the second in a *Twentieth Century Literature* pair of special issues devoted to Durrell.

Why should Durrell continue to receive so much attention? Consider the magnitude of his achievement. He has completed sixteen novels; seven volumes of poetry have appeared from his main publishers in England and America, besides various small press and privately printed items; his three plays have all been performed, two of

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them by Gustaf Gründgens in Hamburg, *Sappho* with Margaret Rawlings in the title role at the Edinburgh Festival of 1961; he has written five volumes on travel and foreign residence, including the prize-winning *Bitter Lemons*; and his monograph, *A Key to Modern British Poetry*, attests to the depth of his knowledge of his immediate predecessors and his contemporaries.

The present volume takes up some of the major subjects in Durrell criticism, in essays written, with one exception, expressly for this collection. We have not attempted a systematic overview of his work, rather, a selection of the best current scholarship on Durrell. The approaches to Durrell contained here are eclectic: psychoanalytical, thematic, symbolic, archetypal, comparative.

There has been a tendency in previous criticism to overlook the importance of the major psychologists to Durrell's novels. This lacuna in Durrell studies is odd, given his efforts to promote the German pioneer psychoanalyst Georg Groddeck, his rather obvious use of the psychosomatic "check" in *Justine*, and his significant invoking of Sigmund Freud as "Dr. Joy" in *The Avignon Quintet*. Sharon Spencer has turned the burning glass of Rankian analysis onto the pattern of sibling incest in both the *Quartet* and the *Quintet*, and her study shows how well Durrell's tormented lovers fit the mythic archetypes. This is no mere arbitrary application of an analytical tool: those who have examined Durrell's personal library know how many of the standard texts of psychoanalysis he has owned, and he must have discussed Rank with his friend Anaïs Nin, for a time apprentice to Rank and, briefly, his lover.

James R. Nichols sees Durrell's classical paganism as the controlling leitmotif in his work, and provides an interpretation especially significant for its inclusion of Durrell's play *Sappho* in the central line of his thought. Nichols is, like Spencer, acutely conscious of the mythic element throughout Durrell's work, but Nichols approaches it through classical and religious archetypes rather than via psychological models, and he applies his findings to a definition of Durrell's classical humanism. Durrell's vision is, he tells us, "essentially Greek and stoic," but his aim is nothing less than the redirection of western society.

He who would track Durrell through his fiction must be prepared to follow a devious course, as the studies by Spencer and Nichols illustrate: Durrell is protean, a master of assimilation and disguise. In his poetry Durrell speaks more directly to the reader. Roger Bowen considers an undervalued part of Durrell's creative life, concentrating on one major period of poetic production, the Egyptian poems of *Cities, Plains, and People*. Bowen's paper examines Durrell's thinking as

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expressed in his verse during the crucial time when he was living the events and experiencing the ambience behind *The Alexandria Quartet*. Bowen presents a compelling argument for Durrell's derivation from the agonies of exile of an important part of his magical skill in recreating "real" and "imaginary" places and people. Thus, Bowen's essay suggests a vital link between Durrell's verse and his accomplishment in the *Quartet*.

Carol Peirce's study of the *Quartet* sifts from Shakespearean allusions down, in an archeological sense, to "history, legend, and myth." To Durrell's own Alexandria and to Cavafy's Alexandria as reported by Durrell must be added the Egypt of Antony and Cleopatra. Woven perfectly with these strands is a pattern of Tarot references too compelling to be ignored, and a pattern of Christian myth as well: the palimpsest must be read at every level. After a concise explication of the rich layering she has perceived, Peirce considers the *Quartet* in relation to the modes of style Durrell attempts (romance, realism, naturalism, classicism), thus placing the work within the context of nineteenth and twentieth century fiction.

Ray Morrison finds in the hundreds of mirrors and their cognates in the *Quartet* the controlling image and symbol of the work. Then, skirting the facile—and surely, on Durrell's part, rather tongue-in-cheek—derivation from Einstein of the arrangement of the individual volumes, Morrison reveals an important source for Durrell's individualized conception of relativity: Samuel Alexander's *Space, Time and Deity*. Another focus for Durrell's thought is the Tao, in which the one-ness of space gives birth to—as it accepts—multiplicity: the multiple mirror images in Durrell's Heraldic Universe.

Reed Way Dasenbrock analyzes the rise and fall of Durrell's popularity in the English-speaking world, and goes beyond the readily accepted influence on Durrell of the great modernist writers, to discuss his departures from the acknowledged "modes" of modernism as offering an explanation for Durrell's decline in public favor. Dasenbrock makes the iconoclastic claim that *Tunc* and *Nunquam* (later republished in one volume as *The Revolt of Aphrodite*), the novels that he sees as marking the downward turning point in Durrell's popularity, failed to attain a widespread readership not because they are lesser qua novels than the *Quartet* volumes, but because they disappoint the readers' expectations of finding the conventions of modernism repeated as Durrell had exploited them in the *Quartet*. As Durrell moved beyond the *Quartet*, he left the majority of his readers behind.

Gregory Dickson's focus is also on *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, and he

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shows how carefully Durrell, the apostle of the "spirit of place," has linked character to setting. In the logic of place, the commercial world of the Merlin empire exists between two polarities, rational London and mystical Istanbul, each place determining a set of characters. But in Durrell's curious pattern of inversions, Iolanthe, the mechanical human, in the cold environment of "mechanical" St. Paul's Cathedral destroys her live master. Setting determines character with a vengeance.

The last two essays concentrate on *The Avignon Quintet*, a "quincunx" of novels the author disdains to term a sequence, preferring to designate them siblings in a *gigogne*, an interlocking pattern like the boxes in a Chinese puzzle. William L. Godshalk maintains that each novel has a double function, and is at once "complete within itself" and part of an interlocking whole. This double function is not, however, merely a clever structural ploy but a reflection of the characters, who are at once "real" and "imaginary," discrete and interchangeable. Actions too break loose from rational predictability and logic. Even "language becomes random" as meaning breaks down. Godshalk ties these factors into Durrell's vision of the entropy of the universe.

While Godshalk has concentrated upon the "version of the truth" presented in *Sebastian*, the fourth novel in the Avignon quincunx, Lawrence W. Markert considers the entire *Quintet* against a pattern of influence by D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence's influence on Durrell is well established: readers of the early *Black Book* (1938) will recall that Chamberlain with all his talk of "bowels of compassion" is a walking parody of Lawrence's ideas. Markert, however, shows Durrell reflecting Lawrence, not in parody but seriously, structuring his concept of the "death-drift," the destructiveness, of western civilization after the Lawrence of *Women in Love* and *Kangaroo*. The instability of character, noted by Godshalk, is traced by Markert to Lawrence's expressed desire for novels "freed from the stable ego."

A good measure of the significance of Lawrence Durrell as creative artist and as thinker is that despite the amount published on him during the past twenty-five years so much clearly remains to be said. To use Durrell's own term, there are *workpoints* everywhere one cares to look. A whole set of comparative studies is needed to help locate Durrell with respect to his modernist predecessors and his post-modernist contemporaries. For instance, Richard Aldington claimed that Durrell in writing the *Quartet* had proved that there was still life in the novel after Joyce, that Joyce had not succeeded in "killing" the novel. Turning to another genre, Durrell has professed an admiration of Auden as a poet equal in stature to Eliot, Durrell's mentor. His friendship with Claude

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Seignolle, the French specialist in the macabre, invites a glance into another room in the house of Durrell. Durrell's wide reading and extremely retentive memory are further indications that his supposed isolation in his various exiles has not made him ignorant of his contemporaries. Perhaps the widest gap in Durrell scholarship is the virtual absence of any consideration of his Continental European standing, higher now—as it has been for many years—than his reputation in English-speaking countries. He has been widely and well translated, yet the style, quality, and even bibliography of the translations have been largely overlooked. Durrell's uses of the terms and concepts of architecture, archeology, and medicine appear to be highly significant, and should be explored. Critics are just beginning to look into the Eastern philosophies inherent as well as implicit in his work. And there are many other open questions.

Durrell was lucky in receiving early recognition from the likes of T. S. Eliot, James Laughlin, and Henry Miller. His popular success had to wait twenty years until the publication of *The Alexandria Quartet* from 1957 through 1960. At present his credit with the general reader has fallen considerably from the peak years of the popularity of the *Quartet*; however, as the current spate of critical writing indicates, scholarly interest in Durrell is high, perhaps the most active it has ever been. It remains for the public to catch up. And as Reed Dasenbrock has suggested, the scope of Durrell's novels has expanded, and he has left many of his critics behind as well. Durrell's enigmatic invocation of Wordsworth in his epigraph to *Quinx*, final volume and name-child of the "Quincunx" siblings (Durrell's phrase), shows his realization of the revolutionary nature of his attempt in *The Avignon Quintet*:

... must itself create the taste by which it is to be judged ...
Wordsworth *dixit*

If the present volume serves to turn readers back to Durrell's work, and with greater understanding, it will have served the intended purpose.

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The Ambiguities of Incest in Lawrence Durrell's Heraldic Universe: A Rankian Interpretation

BY SHARON SPENCER

"When he started looking for justifications for our love instead of just simply being proud of it, he read me a quotation from a book. 'In the African burial rites it is the sister who brings the dead king back to life. In Egypt as well as Peru the king, who was considered as God, took his sister to wife. But the motive was ritual and not sexual, for they symbolised the moon and the sun in their conjunction. The king marries his sister because he, as God the star, wandering on earth, is immortal and may therefore not propagate himself in the children of a strange woman, any more than he is allowed to die a natural death.' That is why he was pleased to come there to Egypt, because he felt, he said, an interior poetic link with Osiris and Isis, with Ptolemy and Arsinoë—the race of the sun and the moon!"¹

One of the most intriguing forms of love explored in Lawrence Durrell's meta-project, the novel families comprising *The Alexandria Quartet*, *Tunc and Nunquam*, and *The Avignon Quintet* is incest, sibling incest (not exclusively heterosexual). The two familiar epigraphs to *Justine* cite Freud's comment that "Every sexual act [is] a process in which four persons are involved" and the Marquis de Sade's equation offering Thérèse either crime or "the noose." But, in fact, the novels that follow *Justine* do not, as the readers might expect, excavate either the tabooed relationships between mothers and sons and fathers and daughters, or the implications of Sade's preferred choice between crime ("which," he says, "renders us happy") and "the noose." Except for a few allusions to cross-generational incest,² Durrell does not explore this

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type of relationship, and "crime," if incest is considered a crime, *does* make some of its perpetrators happy in a limited way (Piers, Bruce and Sylvie), but others, like Pursewarden and Livia, are made so *unhappy* by it, that they voluntarily choose "the noose."

In short, incest is extraordinarily alluring to many of Durrell's characters, but it is also—inevitably—dangerous. Apart from the genetic issues, prolonged endogamous intimacy leads, at the very least, to emotional stagnation, and, at the worst, to destruction of the self and of others.

In the major fiction, there are four distinct incestuous configurations involving siblings.³ They represent variations on the problem itself and they are resolved in different ways. All contain either explicit or implicit allusions to the myth of Isis and Osiris, which will be summarized later. One of the many loves depicted in the *Quartet* is that of the poet Pursewarden and his sister Liza. Pursewarden is also involved with Justine, who admits: "My feeling for him was—how shall I say?—almost incestuous, if you like; like one's love for a beloved, an incorrigible elder brother" (*Clea*, 58). Justine herself suffers from classical Freudian hysteria; she is said to have been raped by a male relative when she was a child.

The second constellation occurs in *Tunc* and *Nunquam* and revolves around Benedicta's bondage to her sadistic brother Julian. Although Benedicta is condemned to intense and prolonged suffering, she eventually manages to free herself, with the help of her husband Felix. The third incestuous group comprises the "happy trinity of lovers" in *Monsieur*: Piers, Sylvie and Bruce.⁴ In the *Quintet* the incestuous knot includes a new wrinkle: the unions include homosexuality. Brother and sister, Piers and Sylvie, love and make love to each other, and Bruce, who loves Piers, marries Sylvie (she is pregnant and no one is sure which man is responsible). The baby, who may have been engendered by incest, dies before birth. Bruce's marriage to Sylvie is a mask to conceal his more compelling love for Piers. Finally, in the *Quintet* there is the even more complex knot that ties together Constance and Livia, Livia and Hilary, Aubrey and Livia, and Aubrey and Constance, a knot that Constance tries to untie. Just as in the *Quartet* Liza and Pursewarden are associated with Isis and Osiris, so, in the *Quintet*, are Constance and Livia, the one manifesting a light, the other a dark face. Speaking to Blanford, Sutcliffe remarks: "But Livia had what excited you most—the sexual trigger in the blood; she deserved to be commemorated in a style which we might call metarealism—in her aspect of Osiris whose scattered limbs were distributed all over the

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Mediterranean.”⁵ One of many representations of the earth goddess, Isis repeatedly resurrected the body of her brother Osiris, who was murdered and mutilated by their jealous brother Set. All-powerful Isis was worshipped as the source of all that existed: “On the base of her statue in the city of Sais these enigmatic words were carved: ‘I am everything that was, that is, that shall be . . . Nor has any mortal ever been able to discover what lies under my veil.’”⁶ Somehow, it seems more fitting that the story of Isis and Osiris comes to us from ancient Egypt.

Children of the goddess Nut, Isis, Osiris, Nephthys (Isis’s “dark side”) and Set have different fathers but the same mother. According to legend, Isis and Osiris fell in love while still in their mother’s womb, and there they produced the older Horus. Later, they were married and Osiris assumed the throne of his father Geb. While Osiris traveled about civilizing and teaching the people of the Nile Valley the art of agriculture, which Isis had originally taught him, she administered their kingdom. Unfortunately, she was compelled to defend both herself and the throne against Set, their evil brother, who coveted her body as well as the throne. Eventually, the envious Set murdered Osiris and threw his body into the Nile, from which it was recovered—after many difficulties—by Isis who restored her brother-consort to life.⁷

Known as the Great Enchantress, Isis possessed magical powers as well as the knowledge of healing. One version of the myth relates that when she recovered the body of Osiris in Byblos in Phoenicia, Isis magically succeeded in conceiving Horus by perching over Osiris’s corpse in the form of a kite. Later, however, Set discovered the body of Osiris while hunting by moonlight in the marshes. This time he tore the body into fourteen parts which he scattered throughout the kingdom. This mutilation was more devastating than simple death, because for the ancient Egyptians eternal life depended upon the preservation of the body as an abode for the spirit.

Once again, Isis set out to recover the body of her beloved brother-husband. This time she found all of the severed parts except the penis. Modeling a new penis for Osiris, she reconstituted his body, anointed it with precious oils and performed the rites of embalmment, thereby restoring Osiris to eternal life. In still another version, Isis is said to have swallowed Osiris the savior, who was re-born as the child Horus, who also was incarnated as the moongod Min, or Menu: “He who impregnates his mother.” In annual rituals Osiris was torn apart and reassembled, except for his lost penis. Then, the priestess-impersonator of the goddess Isis sculpted him a new penis of clay.

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finally, giving it—and him—new life by invoking her own holy names as life-giver and death-giver (in her aspect as Nephthys): “Isis, the eternal savior of the race of men, promises her votary: ‘Thou shalt live in blessedness; thou shalt live glorious under my protection. And when thou hast finished thy life-curse and goest down to the underworld, even there in that lower world thou shalt see me shedding light in the gloom of Acheron and Elysian Fields and shalt continually offer worship to me, ever gracious.’ ”⁸

As we have seen, in Durrell's fiction, the myth of Isis and Osiris provides a paradigm for the belief in salvation through rebirth magically achieved through the sister, who symbolizes a benevolent aspect of the great mother goddess. Except for Freud, the early psychoanalytic thinkers, Jung, Rank and, later, Neumann, were aware of the spiritual implications of incest in literature. For example, Jung wrote: “To me incest signified a personal complication only in the rarest cases. Usually, incest has a highly religious aspect, for which reason the incest theme plays a decisive part in almost all cosmogonies and in numerous myths. But Freud clung to the literal interpretation of it and could not grasp the spiritual significance of incest as a symbol.”⁹ In its spiritual sense, brother-sister incest, whether acted out or not, can represent an ideology or faith that immortality can be obtained through the divine intervention of the sister, who can restore life to her dead brother not once only, but repeatedly. She is his sister-lover, and in becoming the agent of rebirth she also becomes a substitute for his mother. This process involves the transformation of an aspect of the archetype of the great mother into the sister, a process that has been studied by Erich Neumann. In his interpretation of the legend of the Aztec hero-god Quetzalcoatl, who was seduced by the mother goddess disguised as his sister, Neumann states that Quetzalcoatl, who regressed into his mother's son-lover, “could not withstand the power of the Terrible Mother. As land of origination, as mother, and as intoxicating sister-beloved, the Feminine proved stronger than the Masculine. True, the Feminine already appears here in its dual form; but since the transformative figure of the sister has not yet crystallized out of the elementary mother figure, the Feminine becomes the Terrible Mother who is doom.”¹⁰ To choose union with the sister at least appears to offer an escape from the destructive, “devouring” aspects of the great mother in her “dark” phase, which represents death.

Turning from the spiritual to the psychological sphere, one notes that even when Durrell's incestuously bound characters escape “doom,” they are psychically limited; they may feel very comfortable emotionally,

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but they fail to grow. In a psychological context, sibling incest expresses a desire to fuse or merge with one's opposite half or mirror image, to become one with a being who is identical to oneself in essential ways, though complementary in gender. This apparently narcissistic impulse becomes even more introverted in the homosexual attachments that are depicted in the *Quintet*. Emotional stagnation is inevitable, because growth can occur only as a response to the challenge of difference. In an essay interpreting Otto Rank's theory of growth, Abraham Schmitt states: "... the two terms that Rank . . . uses are union and separation. The latter two words describe the interpersonal experience that enables a person, according to Rank, to discover the former. It is in union with another person, persons, or with humanity that one discovers and affirms one's likeness. And it is in the experience of separation from man that one discovers and affirms one's own and another's uniqueness or difference."¹¹ Additional insights into the ambiguities of incest in Durrell's fiction can be gained by looking more deeply into Otto Rank's thought as it is detailed in his many books, especially *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909); *The Incest Motif in Poetry and Saga* (1912); *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1914); *The Trauma of Birth and Its Importance for Analytic Therapy* (1924); *Art and Artist: Creative Urge and Personality Development* (1932); and *Beyond Psychology* (published posthumously in 1941).¹²

Rank was among the first members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society to challenge Freud's insistence that the mother's significance for the male child was limited to her seductive feminine appeal.¹³ Rank was also among the first to study deeply the impact on the male of having been physiologically—and emotionally—dependent on his mother's body, and the implications of this dependency in the later formation of ideologies about mortality/immortality. In an extraordinarily insightful essay called "Feminine Psychology and Masculine Ideology" (*Beyond Psychology*), Rank argues that the motivation for male claims of superiority and arduous efforts to control women derives from man's persistent struggle to deny his physical birth from the body of the woman. This idea is reiterated by Neumann: "Because the patriarchal world strives to deny its dark and 'lowly' lineage, its origin in this primordial world, it does everything in its power to conceal its own descent from the Dark Mother and considers it necessary to forge a 'higher genealogy,' tracing its descent from heaven, the god of heaven, and the luminous aspect. But nearly all the early and primitive documents trace the origin of the world and of man to the darkness, the Great Round, the goddess" (*The Great Mother*, 212). Both thinkers agree

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that all human beings need and seek assurances of their immortality, and to meet this need create the elaborate systems of belief embodied in folklore, mythology and religion.

The great majority of people are satisfied to perpetuate themselves through biological reproduction (note the word itself). The genes of the ancestors are incorporated into successive generations, creating an entity that is at once individual and collective, the physical embodiment of all those who preceded him or her. But the immortality offered by procreation was, Rank argued, unacceptable to creative or "productive" personality types, as Rank called such people. They fear death with special intensity, and, as a consequence of this fear, they tend to avoid procreation, which is a blatant reminder of mortality. What is born of woman dies. To circumvent this problem men have developed a variety of intellectual strategies designed to provide them with the illusion of transcending the material plane of life. This is particularly noticeable when one looks at the lives and works of artists. Unlike neurotics who fear failure in life, creative types view death as the ultimate failure: the failure to perpetuate oneself eternally. All of Durrell's anti-heroic male protagonists are creative or "productive" types, and some of them (Pursewarden, Julian, Piers, and Hilary) turn to their sisters as the partners who not only complete them by being their opposite halves or doubles, but who also can be idealized, through identification with Isis, into numinous images that transform them into their brothers' saviors. Thus, the desire to adopt an ideology that promises immortality is the most exalted motivation for brother-sister incest. Naturally, there are others which are more overtly pragmatic.

Tunc and *Nunquam*, for example, offer a situation in which, initially, the intense bonding of the siblings, Julian and Benedicta, is a defense against the sadistic intentions of their father. As such, it fails, for Merlin not only systematically violates Benedicta, but he also castrates and "mocks" Julian, inadvertently providing the motivation for Julian's devolution from one-time victim to artful and powerful victimizer. The boldness and accuracy with which Durrell has portrayed this cycle is admirable.

A more subtle reason for the close bonding of brother and sister in incest is suggested by Rank in his writings *The Double* and "The Creation of the Sexual Self" (*Beyond Psychology*). The desire to build up or to double one's ego by identifying with another who is regarded as a "twin" is the result of anxiety about the adequacy of the self. Except for Benedicta, the sibling lovers depicted by Durrell are deeply gratified by their unions, and the comforting sense of likeness is, predictably,

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difficult, perhaps even impossible, to surrender, even when there is an awareness of limitation. Piers, for example, knows that his growth has been limited by his love for Sylvie:

"Everything, both the best and the worst, came to him because of his sister . . . for he tried to avoid loving her without avail. This was his greatest single experience, and yet he always felt that it conferred a limitation on his growth The only other love in his life was for a man who loved him with a dispassionate singleness of intent—and who also loved his sister. The three of them could hardly tell themselves apart, became a sort of congeries of loving emotions, all mutually complementary. . . . they lived a quasi-worldly life for years, which had little reality outside the company of each other. A happy trinity of lovers. . . ." (*Monsieur*, 39)

Certainly, this harmonious mode of life is alluring. One is reminded of Ian Hugo's film *Bells of Atlantis*, based on Anaïs Nin's prose poem *House of Incest*; in the film the author-narrator is rocked gently in an underwater cocoon, blissfully removed from the clashing realities of life on earth. Piers's avowed experience of incest and of inversion suggests the comfort of a recovered Eden, a state of all-embracing harmony and sweetness that seems truly primitive because it precludes individuality. Once again, there is the possibility of a child whose paternity is ambiguous; the result of Sylvie's pregnancy is not a birth but a "provoked miscarriage" (*Monsieur*, 18). Piers's confessed limited growth is further emphasized by his sister's refusal to give birth, in fact if not in intent, denying him a way of reproducing himself as well as the experience of fatherhood. Such a "congeries of loving emotions" may provide a harmonious and serene state of being, but it cannot foster growth, nor can it sustain the creation of a new life. It seems inevitable that the children of incestuous lovers should not live to become adults.

The death of their child is also a critical event in the love between Pursewarden and Liza. To elevate his liaison with his sister, who is consistently described in imagery that suggests classical sculpture, Pursewarden welcomes a sojourn in Egypt because it brings him closer to the mythological story of Isis and Osiris, which he depends upon to rationalize what he wishes to believe is the transcendent nature of their love. This is what Pursewarden means when he reads to Liza from a book that says: ". . . it is the sister who brings the dead king back to life."

However, Liza and Pursewarden's relationship does not prosper. The death of their child poisons their feelings, turning the rapture they once experienced to negativity, leaving only the bond of guilt. Liza

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confesses to Darley: "We were lovers, you know. That is really the meaning of his story and mine. He tried to break away. His marriage foundered on this question. It was perhaps dishonest of him not to have told her the truth before he married her. . . . For many years we enjoyed a perfect happiness, he and I. That it ended tragically is nobody's fault I suppose. He could not free himself from my inside hold on him, though he tried and struggled. I could not free myself from him, though truthfully I never wished to until . . ." (*Clea*, 170).

Breaking off, she describes her love for David Mountolive, "the dark stranger." After showing Darley a photograph of her child by Pursewarden, she concludes: "We were united by our guilt from that moment. I have often asked myself why it should so be. Tremendous unbroken happiness and then . . . one day, like an iron shutter falling, guilt" (*Clea*, 174).

Turning outward, Liza is "saved" through her love for Mountolive, "the dark stranger" (i.e., exogamous partner). By contrast, Pursewarden's confession to Melissa is a pathetic prophecy: "'We shall never be able to love other people.' . . . he spoke of his love and his deliberate abandoning of it, of his attempt at marriage, of its failure."¹⁴ A few hours later he commits suicide.

A characteristic Durrell joke restates the well-known adage that love is blind; it is in the poem—inscribed to Liza—which serves to disclose the forbidden relationship to her lover, David Mountolive:

*Greek statues with their bullet holes for eyes
Blinded as Eros by surprise,
The secrets of the foundling heart disguise,
Lover and loved. . . .* (*Mountolive*, 66)

Traditionally, brother-sister marriage has been permitted only to people of noble birth who must not endanger their blood line by exogamous marriage. An ordinary couple who defy the social taboo against their incestuous union are asserting their superiority, enacting (or "acting out") a private myth in which they empower themselves to imagine that they have been elevated to royal stature. The problem with this fantasy is the suffering that it causes in the real world of love and human attachment. One devastating result can be madness.

Like Justine, Liza and Melissa, Benedicta is extraordinarily alluring to Durrell's male characters because of her air of mystery, suffering and potential for violence. Like Justine and Melissa, she has been victimized, but she is not a victim. And, like Livia, she often seems close to madness, frequently appearing to her benighted husband Felix as a "witch," despite the benevolent symbolism of her name. Benedicta's disturbance

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seems parallel to the psychic conflict experienced by a young woman patient of Jung's who was a victim of sibling incest: "As a result of the incest to which she had been subjected as a girl, she felt humiliated in the eyes of the world, but elevated in the realm of fantasy. She had been transported into a mythic realm; for incest is traditionally a prerogative of royalty and divinities. The consequence was a complete alienation from the world, a state of psychosis. She became 'extramundane,' as it were, and lost contact with humanity. . . . By telling me her story she had in a sense betrayed the demon and attached herself to an earthly human being. Hence she was able to return to life and even to marry" (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 130).

In spite of her psychic imprisonment, Benedicta has acquired an adoring husband who wants to help her become a healthy woman. Secretly, she is dangerous to Felix, because she is still mentally enslaved by her brother Julian. As in the *Quartet* and the *Quintet*, there is a child who dies, a boy, but his death—instead of alienating Benedicta and Felix even further—is an important factor in their healing and eventual reconciliation. Throughout his relationship with her, Felix, the exogamous partner, the "outsider," has been menaced both by Julian directly and indirectly through his power to manipulate Benedicta. Aided by Felix's patience and by her own struggle, Benedicta is eventually liberated from Julian, thereby released to experience love for Felix. It is significant that she gathers together and burns her former costumes and disguises: "Black smoke and flame rose from this pyre. I [Felix] did not question, did not exclaim, did not speak. 'From now on nothing that isn't my own,' she said. 'But I wanted to do it with you, somehow. Just to prove.'" ¹⁵ Benedicta "proves" that she has given up the grandiosity of her fantasies and moved into the realm of the real and the human.

In *Livia*, *Constance*, *Sebastian*, and *Quinx* the incestuously involved characters flounder, flailing in an emotional Sargasso Sea of hopelessly concatenated entanglements. Livia is bound both to Constance, her sister, and to Hilary, her brother. In *Sebastian*, Constance and Sylvie have a brief affair, which aids in liberating Sylvie from her incestuous bond to Piers: "To be a whole person discountenanced all nature. It is different for me now that I have betrayed my brother in turning to you; I am clothed from head to foot in a marvellous seamless euphoria. In my mind your kisses clothe me close as chain-mail link by link."¹⁶ Just as some of the male characters avoided the threatening mother by entering into unions with the transformative figures of their supportive and nurturing sisters, sisters seek union with each other. Female

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inversion is explained as a response to an "implacable hatred" for the mother (*Livia*, 16). Constance articulates "the cruel paradox of Livia's case . . . indeed the total narcissism which is expressed in inversion derives from the sense of abandon by the mother. But crueller still, the sexual drive which alone satisfies it consists of a mock incest precisely with her abandoner" (*Livia*, 67). The convoluted relationships of the *Quintet* include Livia's seduction of Aubrey to prevent him from being with Constance. (One is reminded of a similar strategy in a novel by Durrell's long-time friend, the late Anaïs Nin. In *Ladders to Fire* Lillian deliberately makes friends with a woman to whom her lover Jay is attracted; Lillian hopes to win the other woman's loyalty as a friend so that she will refuse Jay's advances.) Livia's "strangeness" is similar to Benedicta's. Both are "extramundane," to borrow Jung's term, alienated from reality by the grandiosity of their fantasy of royal status, but the resolutions of their periodic madnesses differ, the one attaining liberation through the love of an "outsider," the other succumbing to an illness that culminates in suicide. A contemporary incarnation of the "belle dame sans merci" as devoid of ethics as Djuna Barnes's Robin Vote, Livia is powerfully attractive to men precisely because she is unattainable. By now readers have begun to believe—despite their hopes to the contrary—that love truly *is* blind.

The incestuously-involved characters created by Durrell's own special legerdemain dramatize a human dilemma which is expressed differently in the writings of Otto Rank. It is the ambivalence of the creative or "productive" individual (whether artist, scientist, or businessman) when he or she must choose between the comforting reassurance of union with one cast in his/her own likeness (sameness) and the challenge offered by allying oneself with the *other*, the complementary, the exogamous partner, the mate who provides contrasting qualities (a condition characterized by difference). The former choice provides the soothing, womb-like ambience that fosters peace, harmony, and unity, but if one remains there too long, the consequences are narcissistic stagnation and death; difference creates situations that are characterized by tension, rivalry, challenge, and opposition, but also provide opportunities for stimulation, growth, and for *real* love, love of a being who is more than a reflection of the self, a being who is an authentic autonomous individual, and complete within him/herself. Humans achieve growth by means of an alternating motion between the states of union and separation.

To love incestuously is to refuse separation from the mother; that is to say, it signifies choosing regression. As we have seen, Durrell's

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incestuously bound characters are compelled to sustain incredible tension, because they are torn between two states of being: their human need for love and for growth, which is achieved through exogamous union, through difference; and their heroic need for transcendence, which they attempt to attain by transgressing the taboo against incest for ordinary humans who are not of royal birth. With the exception of the "happy trinity of lovers" depicted in *Monsieur*, and Benedicta's eventual alliance with Felix, Durrell's incestuous loves end in stagnation or tragedy.

"In a word," Rank wrote in "Two Kinds of Love," "modern love is no longer Eros or Agape but has become Psyche, that is, basically, not a sexual but a psychological problem experienced in moral terms of good and bad. We have developed in ourselves both tendencies of love, the masculine Eros and the feminine Agape, the simultaneous expression of which makes human relationships into a symbiose of two parasites feeding on each other's 'goodness.' Such relationship revives the primitive twin-conception of an alter-ego which modern man tries to find in the other sex, thereby denying its natural value as a symbol of difference. His ego wants likeness to support his yearning for personal immortalization while his personality needs difference in order to complement the denied part of his natural self."¹⁷

Viewing Lawrence Durrell's artistic voice as a medium for the expression of a problem that is keenly experienced by his contemporaries, one wishes to conclude by applauding his courage. And by posing a question: is it possible that the increasing difficulties of relationships between the sexes have intensified the yearning for an easier, a more comforting, a lulling, even a narcotic refuge in the arms of a lover who is a representation of the great mother, within whose body life began and within whose body life can, in the psychic sense, also end? The seductive appeal of incest, with its sinister emotional undertow, may well be one of the most profound discoveries made by Lawrence Durrell in his literary excavation of some of the most ancient, and also the newest and least habitable, territories of modern love.

¹ Lawrence Durrell, *Clea* (New York: Dutton, 1960), p. 191. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Clea*.

² Three references to cross-generational incest occur in the *Quartet*: Capodistria's anecdote about his father's life-size hot water bottle designed to resemble his mother, Sabrina (*Justine*, 34–35); Leila's meditation concerning the possibility that her love for David Mountolive—considerably her junior in age—might have represented a displaced attachment to her son, Nessim (*Mountolive*,

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53-54); and a comment in *Clea* with reference to the protagonist and her father that "A daughter is closer than a wife" (234).

³ Some readers might ask whether the prominence of incest in Durrell's fiction suggests that he has a personal obsession with the subject, that there is implied autobiographical content in these complicated forbidden loves. Not at all, in the view of this critic. Although it is true that neo-Freudian critics might insist on such a literal connection, other thinkers with roots in more sophisticated systems of thought insist that there is not necessarily a meaningful relationship between the individual artist's life and the content of his or her work. Like Jung, Otto Rank denied that the artist could be explained on the basis of insights gained from his works. Both thinkers believed that the artist's personality and ego were less significant in defining his expressive mission than what Rank called his "creative will" and what Jung described as the artist's need to surrender his personal aspirations to the drive he experiences to become an instrument for the expression of the archetypes that originate in the collective unconscious, thereby expressing universal human content. Without blurring the real differences between the two men's ideas, I wish to stress that both regarded the artist as a medium for the expression of the compelling collective issues of his or her era. Consequently, Durrell's concern with the intense loves of brothers and sisters can be seen as a contemporary expression of an ancient human problem.

⁴ Lawrence Durrell, *Monsieur* (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 18. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Monsieur*.

⁵ Lawrence Durrell, *Livia: or, Buried Alive* (New York: Viking, 1978), pp. 9-10.

⁶ Kurt Seligmann, *Magic, Supernaturalism and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), p. 43.

⁷ This account is drawn largely from Veronica Lons, *Egyptian Mythology* (Middlesex, England: Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1965).

⁸ Barbara G. Walker, ed., *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 454.

⁹ Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffe and translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston, (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 167. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.

¹⁰ Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, translated by Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series XLVII (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), p. 208. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *The Great Mother*.

¹¹ Abraham Schmitt, "The Pattern of Rankian Growth Process," *Journal of the Otto Rank Association*, 8, No. 1 (June, 1973), p. 41.

¹² A corrective reading of the Freudian version of the Oedipal complex is offered by *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, edited by Barbara G. Walker. It states: "Thanks to Freud, King Oedipus is one of the most misinterpreted figures in mythology. His mother-marrying, father-killing legend arose not from a wish-fulfillment fantasy but from the ancient system of succession of sacred kings, whereby every previous king was slain by his successor, chosen to be the queen's new bridegroom. The killer was always described as a "son" of the deceased because he was the same god reincarnated

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in another consort of the same mother-bride. Such sacred incest can still be traced even in the Christian image of the divine Son who is indistinguishable from his Father, who impregnated his own Mother (i.e., Mother of God) to beget himself" (429; see reference #8).

¹³ In 1912 Rank published a comprehensive study of incest in German titled *Das Inzest-Motiv in Dichtung und Sage*. As far as I have been able to discover, this book has not been translated into English and, unfortunately, it is out of print in the German. Some English language fragments exist in manuscript form in Butler Library at Columbia University; seemingly, someone began to translate the book into English but did not complete the project. The title page indicates the scope of the work and suggests the need for an enterprising person to translate it into English:

*The Incest Motif in Poetry and Saga:
An Anthropological Study of Literature*

Introduction: The History of the Oedipal Complex

Part I: The Folkloric Sources

1. The Greek Interpretation of the Oedipus Saga
2. The Social Reasons for the Incest Taboo
3. The Spiritual Significance of the Incest Idea
4. The Mythological Forerunners of the Tragedy

Part II: The Tragic Conflicts

- 5-8 comprise a detailed comparison of the Oedipus materials with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Part III: The Social Aspects of Incest

9. The Fight Between Father and Son
10. The Relations Between Father and Daughter
11. Medieval and Christian Legends
12. Incest in Belief, Customs, and Laws of Peoples

Part IV: Romantic Elaborations and Modern Interpretations

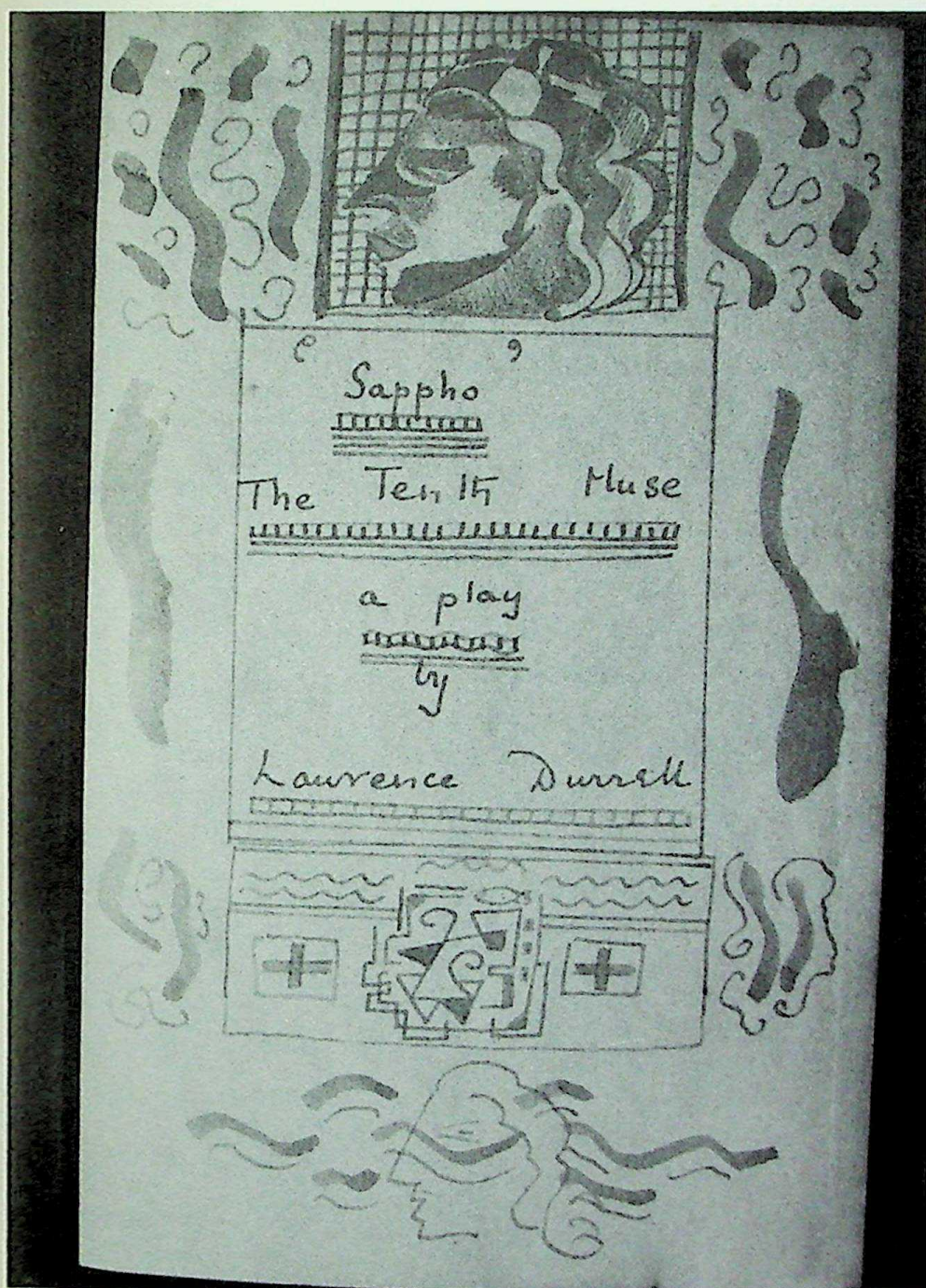
13. The Hostile Brothers and the Twin Motif
14. Love Between Brother and Sister in Romanticism
15. Personal Expressions of the Incest Idea
16. The Family Conflict in Modern Literature

¹⁴ Lawrence Durrell, *Mountolive* (New York: Dutton, 1959), pp. 173-74. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Mountolive*.

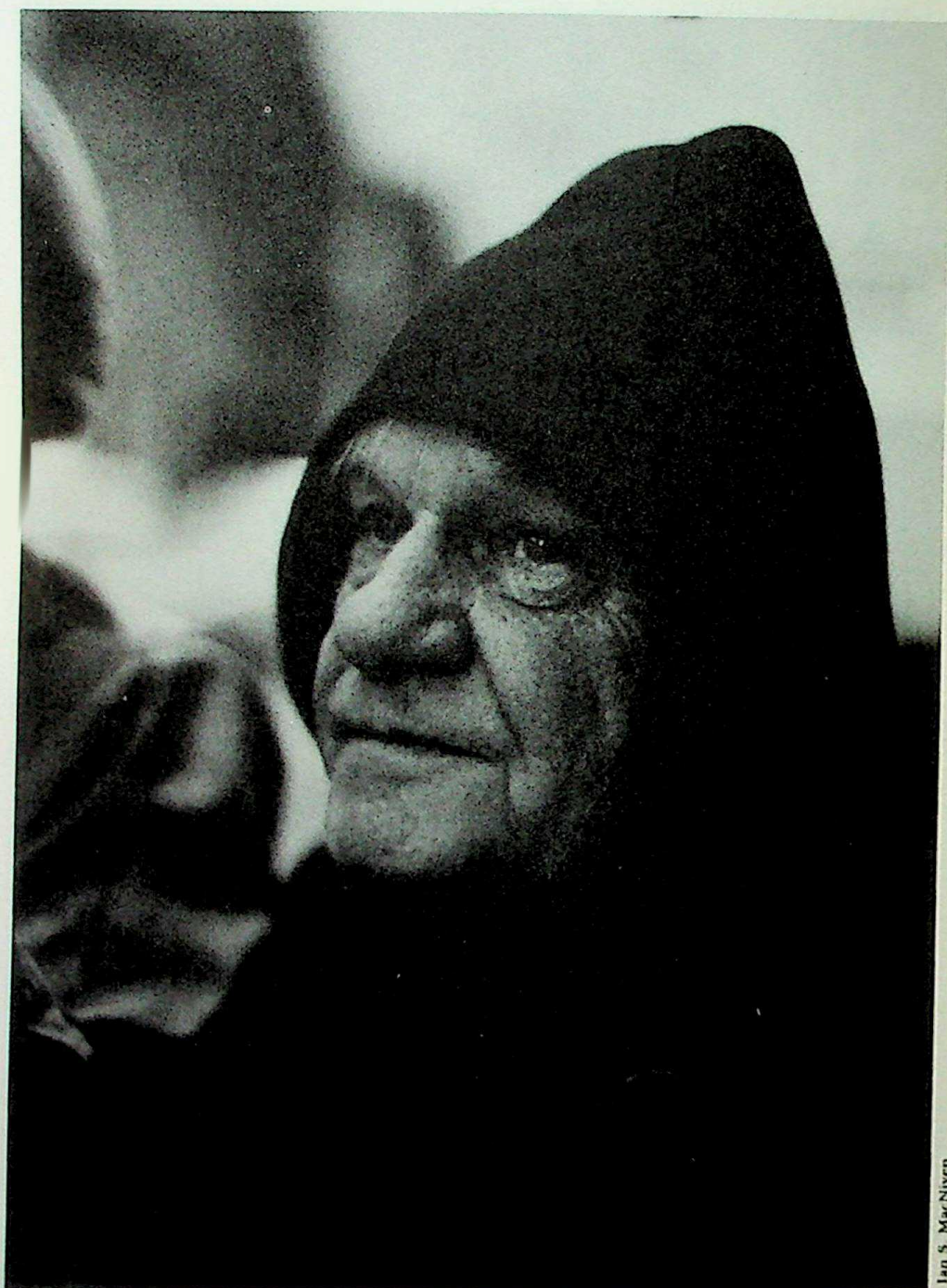
¹⁵ Lawrence Durrell, *Nunquam* (New York: Dutton, 1970), p. 68.

¹⁶ Lawrence Durrell, *Sebastian: or, Ruling Passions* (New York: Viking, 1984), p. 195.

¹⁷ "Two Kinds of Love," *Beyond Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1941), p. 201.



Cover design by Lawrence Durrell, from a Quarry Notebook.



Ian S. MacNiven

Lawrence Durrell in Manhattan.

Ah—the Wonder of My Body; the Wandering of My Mind: Classicism and Lawrence Durrell's Literary Tradition

BY JAMES R. NICHOLS

In Act I, Scene 2 of Lawrence Durrell's much-ignored play *Sappho*, Diomedes, a secondary character and seemingly indifferent poet (what some of us might call, somewhat unsympathetically, a drunken bum) wakes from his stupor of the previous night's party only to face three silly young girls, Joy, Chloe, and Doris, maids who are trying desperately to clean up the house. The girls try to hurry him on his way, but fat old Diomedes will not be chastened. Bedecked with wreaths he exclaims to the girls, "Twice this week I've won the laurel from Sappho."¹

Crowned with laurel, fat, vulgar, wine-beslobbered, old Diomedes makes innocuous chit-chat with three silly young things, one of whom is to marry his son, and tries to sleep once more, only finally to be forcibly carried off stage by the girls while crying to the audience "A rape! A rape! A palpable rape!" (*Sappho*, 17).

Ironically, as a secondary character Diomedes outlines the basis of the play's value system—man as body and flesh, art and life as imitations of one another. It is his later death that so irrevocably casts Sappho off from what she might have so easily possessed, that for which all Durrell's protagonists search, human love.

Diomedes is crucial to both the action and theme of *Sappho*. For Durrell, he is the embodiment of the old male boast that one wishes to live to a hundred and twenty and then be shot by a jealous lover. Thus, it is poignant tragedy near the play's conclusion when Diomedes

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chooses suicide because of his son's death, and Sappho can only blame herself for both losses.

Diomedes had been life itself, living, breathing, sweating flesh, gloriously untainted by the constant reflection and self-incrimination which is Sappho's lot. As a representative of the healthy pagan world, Diomedes is without peer in the Durrellian canon. He is true man, asserting life, joy, optimism, communality, carnality, conviviality, a life of human consequence as opposed to mechanism, energy and accomplishment without guilt, and the embodiment of spirit and flesh as one. He remains the quintessence of Durrell's paganism—man in dialogue with himself to create, not discover, himself.

Earlier, he sings to Sappho and Phaon:

Though appetite is free, yet the belly is bounded.
 Though desire is limitless, capacity is small.
 Shall we define the free man mathematically
 As the center of a circle with no circumference?
 As almost a God, yet never quite a man. (*Sappho*, 68)

The stanza describes what Lawrence Durrell conceives pagan man to be. Old Diomedes, with all his faults and flaws, represents no less than the organizing principle and paradox of human society. He is pagan, fleshy normality before original sin and, therefore, is in no need of Christ's sacrifice upon the cross. At the core of Sappho's failure is her abandonment of Diomedes until it is too late to help him. Both Sappho and Pittakos strive toward their own understanding of personal virtue. Only Diomedes avoids the seductions of that abstraction and places himself squarely within the physical and material world. He is too sensitive to deny the truths of human experience and too complex not to revel in them.

As exemplum, much ignored and much forgotten Diomedes illustrates a crucial characteristic of Lawrence Durrell's artistic tradition. Perhaps surprisingly, Durrell is essentially a classicist, and the central structure of his classicism is a denial of original sin and the heroic myth. There are no epic heroes in Durrell, neither a Homeric Odysseus nor a smoldering and dominant Lawrencian Mellors. There is not even a darkly anti-heroic Richardsonian Lovelace, so carefully does Durrell avoid romantic self-indulgence.

Diomedes, possibly more than any other Durrellian protagonist (published in 1950, *Sappho* is far removed from the *Quartet*), suggests the pathway along which Durrell's paganism has always led him. Durrell's artistry has been informed by a view of man that trusts in the communality and supportive nature of the heroic ideal.

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As an answer to what he believes has become the sickness of a modern Christian world, Durrell's paganism asserts three major paradoxes about the human nature: that the tragedy of human experience is neither good nor evil but merely inevitable, that the separation of flesh and spirit is false and destructive of human happiness, and finally that pure freedom, either physical or psychological, is an illusion which, once recognized, assures its own reality.

If we look closely at *Sappho*, a surprising possibility thus emerges. The play can and should be read as classic and tragic morality, non-Christian and non-allegorical no doubt, but clearly as a lesson about the proper position of mankind within the cosmos. The play becomes a lesson in the nature of human vanity, the danger of seeking individual virtue, and the emptiness of worldly achievement that denies intimate, human contact.

At the play's end, Sappho can only tell young Kleis to "Weep, Weep, Weep" because, evidently, the "murderous armament of time is without compassion or pity" (*Sappho*, 186). We may hope for no graces to live by, muses Sappho self-pityingly. Yet Kleis has asked only for a kiss. Grace itself! And a kiss is love, and compassion, and human reassurance. The knife-like pain of Sappho's tragedy is that she wishes to assert both of Durrell's great goals of life—Joy and Community—and is unable to do so because she searches for the great pretenders—wisdom and personal virtue.

Listen to Sappho's poem in response to Diomedes:

"O Freedom which to every man entire
Presents imagined longings to his fire,
To swans the water, bees the honey-cell,
To bats the dark, to lovers loving well,
Only to the wise may you
Restricting and confining be,
All who half-delivered from themselves
Suffer your conspiracy,
Freedom, Freedom, prison of the free." (*Sappho*, 69)

When Sappho finishes, Durrell's stage direction proclaims only moderate applause, but Diomedes is asked by Phaon to surrender the laurel. Under protest, he begins to but is interrupted by Minos and never does. The paradox remains. Only to the wise is freedom confining, and Sappho is without her laurel. We are left to wonder.

That Durrell is essentially a classicist is not an entirely new suggestion. John Unterecker has noted, quite rightly so, that Durrell's indeterminacy is a rejection of modernism, a re-evocation, implies

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Unterecker, of the psychological novel of Richardson with a freed humanistic morality.² It is not just idle to note, by the way, that the comment applies equally well to Dorothy as to Samuel. Modernism has never been very modern. But, most importantly, Unterecker places Durrell with Joyce, Eliot, Gide, Woolf, and the others. Good company for a pagan and classicist.

The same artistic classicism has been noted repeatedly by other critics. G. S. Fraser insists that Durrell's *Black Book* characters are "Jonsonian humours."³ For Fraser, Durrell is very old-fashioned. His readings are classical: Horace, Sade, La Rochefoucauld, Goethe, Petronius. His style is often Pateresque and mannerist—too self-conscious at times. Like Iris Murdoch (and like Eliot as well?) he plays games, and his belief in man's freedom is essentially Kierkegaardian (Fraser, 13–15). To the list we might also add that Durrell's comic cynicism is quintessentially Auden, an artistry that makes Durrell a bit of a "social moralist" (Fraser, 38) in spite of Fraser and because of Groddeck. Certainly *Tunc* and *Nunquam* display a clear Audenesque and Juvenalian social conscience.

Weigel, too, places the same influence within Durrell's intellectual development, adding Wodehouse, Rimbaud's letters, and Zen Buddhism⁴ to the "soup-mix continuum." Harry T. Moore has also noted the influence upon Durrell of Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin.⁵ Later, Alan Warren Friedman included Nietzsche and Yeats, among others.⁶ The list could go on and on. Durrell is widely read both in and by others. But central to understanding Durrell's classicism is not the length of his readings as much as its variety. His mind has ranged widely, carrying with it a profound humanity and limitless vision.

Still, it would be a serious mistake to see Durrell's paganism as merely a rejection of what he considers the unnecessarily guilt-ridden Christian principles of western society. Durrell is a much more positive thinker. There can be no doubt that he is at odds with the establishment, and that "morality," whatever that might have meant to Augustine or Calvin, is to Durrell a human concoction, not God's. Both Sappho and Faust discover this.

Even Durrell's early concept of a "Heraldic Universe," that state in which individual man lives so as to assert a human significance beyond himself, is a re-evocation of the ethos of Petronius and Virgil. It is essentially pagan in that it defies time and the assumption of human guilt and is a positive approach to human experience. All knowledge is a well from which individuals draw, and such knowledge is neither inherently evil nor good but specific to the situation, the persons, and

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their demands. The heraldic paradox, as Ray Morrison has so clearly noted, is "Where life and death form a continuum . . . death interrupts nothing . . ."; we exist in a "Heraldic Reality beyond the mirrored surfaces of our life."⁷ Thus life's greatness is beyond the individual, yet it can only spring from him. Man is his own apotheosis, his own justification.

Such a world need not be a godless one nor is such an assertion necessarily sacrilegious. To the contrary, it is the humanity of Durrell's vision that should attract us. In the *Quintet*, God has become the Prince of Darkness (Monsieur) and has failed to play fair with man, not vice versa. Man has the right, indeed the necessary responsibility, to say "No!" Life should be good, humane, and humanly fulfilling. By definition no knowledge is inherently divorced from man's experience. By definition God cannot limit, after the fact, his own created universe. The tragedy of death is defeated by the joy of life, the flesh is continually reborn, and the illusion of freedom is made spiritually palpable in the heraldic life itself. Durrell's vision is essentially Greek and stoic. Durrell as a stoic should not seem odd. The evidences are clearly there—the boat trip down the Rhine in *Monsieur*, the entrance to the cave in *Quinx*, the desert itself in the *Quartet*. Weigel has suggested that when Durrell left the English Death of *The Black Book* he belatedly rediscovered *Panic Spring* (Weigel, 42–43). In that book, a group of people go to the Mediterranean to become well, and wellness (here, and in the *Quartet* and *Quintet*) is a sensual discovery of life without guilt. It is Pan, life at one with nature. In *Panic Spring*, therefore, Walsh does not jump to his death at book's end; for there is no necessity to prove either his own innocence or guilt. Man is free of false choices.

Thus all moralities are relative to Durrell, and Weigel admits this (Weigel, 31), as have many others. *Panic Spring* was an early and flawed work, but it presented what, for Durrell, became man's central choice—whether to allow ourselves to be judged by an arbitrary and self-mocking standard. In *Sappho*, Pittakos carps at Phaon's Calvinistic self-righteous belief that acts prove their causes:

Innocence! Innocence! Have you not ceased
Yet hunting for an innocence behind your acts?

.....

There is no innocence under the sun.
We are all victims. I suppose you suffered
At this imagined guilt of yours—
This innocent guilt? (*Sappho*, 177)

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Pittakos, like all soldiers, considers it only the most outrageous bit of bad luck that Sappho's son was killed in battle by an arrow through the throat. Yet Phaon's belief that he can prove his own virtue through his actions is equally suspect.

For Durrell the classicist, both Christian Innocence and Guilt fail profoundly to describe the human condition. Phaon is guilty of running away from life, of refusing to make necessary decisions, but Pittakos is equally guilty of acting without thought. To seek innocence is to deny life. As Sappho discovers, we *will* soil ourselves. Abstractions such as goodness and evil are great illusions, separating man from his own divinity. All judgment implies stasis, and time, itself, proves the lie.

We must return, then, to Durrell's threefold paradox of good-evil, flesh-spirit, and the illusion of freedom. Sappho's tragedy of judgment is her subsequent denial of experience. The reality of flesh is the spirit's exaltation with its own insufficiency. The orgasm denies man's freedom from self as it affirms his victory over death. Monsieur is at once both god and fakir, man his invention and sworn enemy.

Structurally, Durrell's paganism is a superbly rational approach to the irrationalities of human experience. Durrell's *Black Book* implies the desire for all experience in a single lifetime, the enduring fantasy of the very young and very old artist. It is Fraser, remember, who refers to Durrell as "Pateresque," thus belying Durrell's *fîn de siècle* leanings. Weigel notes that Gracie is a spiritual ancestor of Melissa, and we should remember that Gracie, Melissa, Justine, and Livia are all faces of that ancestor who, as Pater mused,

is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. . . . It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions . . . the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias.⁸

Pater's Mona Lisa, neither modern, nor Renaissance, nor Christian, is the epitome of the Durrellian femme who, though not always fatal, is forever an image of the great, mysterious fecundity of life. For Pater, the Mona Lisa is Leda and St. Anne, "the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea" (Pater, 126).

And this is exactly why Durrell's sexuality is a classic vision of woman, not truly Lawrencian, just as Lawrence's vision is not that of the free woman to whom Durrell points in *Tunc* and *Nunquam* and the *Quintet*. The sexuality of Lawrence's Constance has no cultural history

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woven into her biological certainty. At best Connie is dominated by Mellors and his masculinity, humbled before it and the very Calvinistic prudery which Lawrence wanted so much to deny. Connie needs one man with the power to allow and enable her self-realization. Kate Leslie in *The Plumed Serpent* is, finally, wedded to the same fate.

Durrell's Constance, on the other hand, has a history. She is neither alone nor desperate, and her path is not so much toward a new frontier as toward a rediscovery of a lost world. Durrell's paganism does, indeed, make him a very old-fashioned writer. Durrell's free woman lives beyond Puritanical guilt toward a re-evocation of joy and human completeness. She is not only taught by man, she teaches as well. She, far more than Durrell's males, is the saving and abiding presence in human relationships, most of the time far stronger and less fearful than her lovers. She seeks not virtue but experience, not judgment but understanding. "Older than the rocks among which she sits," insists Pater, she is "all modes of thought and life" (Pater, 125).

The secret to Durrell's women, then, is not merely their sensuality, or non-conformism, or courage, or ability to sacrifice; it is their history, their interpenetration of all experience. They deny nothing and thus encompass all. Justine changes so drastically because she is, in the end, dependent upon men for her identity. But Clea and Constance, and Iolanthe as well, discover themselves as independent beings, without the necessity of male approval. Thus, paradoxically, they are transformed and completed.

Durrell's pagan classicism insists upon this complexity of life, along with the frustrating realization of maturity that there are no easy answers to life's problems, no stable solutions. Both Justine and Balthazar, suggests Lawrence Thornton, represent the "life-denying nihilism"⁹ of Alexandria, the old, stable ego that is uselessly simplistic when confronting the problems of a modern world. Just as there is neither good nor evil, there is neither self nor other. "What's a poor inventor to do?" wails Felix Charlock over the still mechanical body of his creation.¹⁰ The obvious answer, "let go," is, however, only the beginning. Mechanical Iolanthe's death is a tragicomedy of human possessiveness and insecurity. By dying her non-death (mechanism made flesh made mechanism), Iolanthe is perfectly heraldic. Petronius in *Acte* and Diomedes in *Sappho* also die heraldically. All assert that death is preferable to life without human significance.

Freedom, then, is the key to Durrell's world and to his paganism, the very freedom that Sappho loses, first because of her search for virtue and later because of her insistence upon revenge. Illusory, yes.

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Demetrius will not live without it, and Phaon cannot run away to find it. Sappho is never more alone than when she attempts to teach her daughter of the world's pain and fails to give a kiss. And this freedom, this illusion of modern man is found, I suggest, in the alpha and omega of Durrell's heraldic imagery, the labyrinth, as he suggests in the poem "Blood-Count," "in the long blue canals / Of the human heart. . . ."¹¹

In *Cefalû* (1946) Durrell first explained the concept fully, and in the gnostic caves of the *Quintet* he has come full circle. The labyrinth, Daedalus' labyrinth, built to hide the Queen of Crete's monstrous progeny, is another quintessential pagan symbol, representative of patterns and art so complex as to seem aimless, the loss of spiritual creation and so of man's need to discover a "way out" of the material world and back to the spirit. At its center, the labyrinth holds the Minotaur, thus protecting man from the essence of his own masculinity and barbarism while at the same time, paradoxically, ensuring the Minotaur's safety from man. The journey is always, however, the personal journey of man within himself to find and master his own perversity and unimaginable powers, a journey to the center of human experience. The labyrinth and journey are art and life as one creation.

Thus Durrell's labyrinth represents the omphalos, the vulnerable center of creation and the necessary journey that all mankind must make toward self-knowledge and self-realization. Durrell's characters face the labyrinth as questing visitants, intent, sometimes reluctantly, upon discovering their own souls. In *Cefalû*, the attitude of each character (quiet Miss Dale, brassy Miss Dombey, raffish Campion, Fearmax the medium, Captain Baird, Lord Graecen, and the elderly, loving, bourgeois Trumans) toward the labyrinth determines his or her destiny and not the maze itself. One by one the accidental visitants find the Minotaur either to be or not be within themselves. Life and experience become what each imagines it to be. Art becomes reality. The labyrinth comes to represent the complexity and mystery, the wholeness and classic unity of man's experience and not its possibility for virtue. The Trumans, Fearmax, Campion, Miss Dale, and Miss Dombey all come to live beyond judgment. At the novel's end, Elsie Truman at last realizes "that the roof of the world did not really exist, except in their own imaginations!"¹²

Durrell's paganism, then, implies nothing less than a redirection of the very organizing principle of western society. If man's imagination created civilization, then it can recreate it. And if man has gone awry then he can recapture what has been lost. To enter Durrell's labyrinth suggests neither a search for good or evil, nor a search for undiscovered

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truth. Durrell's questers wander back in time and history in search of themselves and their own lost past. As in Keats's *Hyperion*, Apollo, when faced with his own entrance into life, heroically declares "Knowledge enormous makes a God of me." Keats's development of the mystery of Godhead in the lines that follow accurately describe Durrell's artistry:

Names, deeds, grey legends, dire events, rebellions,
Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,
Creations and destroyings, all at once
Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
And deify me, as if some blithe wine
Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,
And so become immortal.¹³

Durrell's humans are "enkindled" to life by experience and action.

Thus Durrell's art is idiosyncratic in a modernist world precisely because so much of his style and thought rise out of the aesthetic movement of the second half of the nineteenth century. Durrell's women, like Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel," find heaven a dreary place and stand at the bar longingly gazing downward toward a land of flesh and blood, movement, change, and imperfection. Durrell's classicism is as bereft of spiritual otherworldliness as Greek and Latin mythology. To Durrell as to Sophocles or Aeschylus, the gods are merely more intense and complete versions of the human beings they imitate so well. Zeus/Jupiter forever longs for sweet young innocent girls. Hera/Juno always protects her own hearth. Ares/Mars takes what he will in primordial sacrifice and creation. Potentiality remains unreal until discovered in form. Aphrodite/Venus as whore is mankind's true savior. And Athena/Minerva is not so much forgotten as present in all else. Wisdom, finally, is knowledge of the flesh, human experience become human sympathy. And comedy is indistinguishable from tragedy as man's final protection against the absurdity of experience.

In the *Quartet*, Scobie, the great invert, achieves sainthood specifically because his sin, his homosexuality, allies him more closely with the human condition than could any kind of virtue. Near the book's end Darley and Clea, heterosexuals at the time by any stretch of the imagination, worship at his tomb. Experience, change, action, struggle, desire, even failure bind humanity more than the imagined perfections of an "excessive puritan morality."¹⁴ Like Morris's Guinevere, Durrell's characters justify sin on the basis of their own supernal

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beauty. And, as Weigel has noted, in Durrell's world all knowledge is equivocal and enigmatic (Weigel, 63).

As an essential organizing principle for society, then, Durrell's paganism specifically rejects Calvinism far more directly than it does Christianity in general. The flitting Cupids of the Renaissance Popes are still at home in Durrell's Mediterranean ethos; and Jesus, himself, is a proto-gnostic, as Akkad characterizes him, going to his own "foolish personal fate."¹⁵ Akkad also notes that Jesus's end was "poetic and not theological." Life became art. Durrell's four M's, Monotheism, Messianism, Monogamy, and Materialism (and Merde as a fifth) fit either a Marxist or Freudian interpretation of history; their rejection finally affirms the living flesh and denies the dead spirit. Marx understood human experience economically as money and gold. Freud saw it as infantile sexuality and excrement. Both asserted possession as the basis of all value (*Monsieur*, 142). Durrell opposes their false modern calculi with a classic view of human sharing and corporate experience.

Durrell's classical mathematics denies the Calvinistic inversion of virtue for experience. Gold-money is merde-shit. The Calvinistic work ethic, a curious inversion of cause-effect logic, is foreign to the *Quartet* and *Quintet* and laughed at in *Tunc* and *Nunquam*.

To Durrell, Calvin's elect are those who, practically, deny their own humanity for an imagined place in an inhumane heaven. The equation, insists Akkad, is simply "matter-spoil-loot-capital value-usury-alienation . . ." Akkad then explains, "It runs counter to nature" (*Monsieur*, 170). Akkad's implications here cannot be more clear. Order is man-made, created out of the primal stuff of the cosmos and human experience. It is not to be discovered as the pattern of a super-human creator. The labyrinth, too, as Bruce later casually acknowledges, is the infinitely complex pattern and interrelationship of concealed motives, and the recording of human action itself produces a kind of lie, an "ordering which may be false" (*Monsieur*, 173).

In one sense, Durrell's classicism is exactly Akkad's gnosticism, one "not of repression and original sin but of creation and relaxation, of love and not doubt" (*Monsieur*, 142). The gnostic death, says Akkad a few lines later, at once redeems all nature and reestablishes "that self-perpetuating cycle of joy which was the bliss of yesterday—the ancient mode of yesterday." Few statements in Durrell's work so accurately describe their creator. Life and human self-realization are possible not through denial but only through the affirmation of man's potentialities. Love, the orgasm, spends and affirms life. Greed, merde, hoards and denies life. Such a philosophy automatically denies

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Godhead and eternality in favor of mankind, mortality, and the ineffability of what is transitory. At one point in "The Venetian Documents," Sutcliffe no longer cares whether "God existed or not—so fantastic was the sunset that it all but sponged away his consciousness" (*Monsieur*, 197). Before the completeness of sensual experience, who needs understanding, pattern, or order?

It is just this insistence upon the paradox of change—that no beauty of the mind can be eternal unless experienced in the flesh—that is at the heart of Durrell's paganism. Akkad had earlier noted that to make "super-sense" one had either to become a poet or stop talking (*Monsieur*, 144). Both instances are closely allied to Wallace Stevens' assertion that "Beauty is momentary in the mind — / . . . / But in the flesh it is immortal." Again, Durrell is revealed as an anti-heroic aesthete with deeply classical and humanistic leanings. Sutcliffe, captured by the moment, reminds us of Sterne's Uncle Toby weeping for Socrates' dead children, after thousands of years, while Mr. Shandy the abstract philosopher cannot understand the sympathy of flesh.

Actually, Durrell's classicism is far more deeply indebted to the comic-humanism of Sterne and the romance of Richardson than to the epic of Fielding or even the manners of Austen. If we may oversimplify for the sake of clarity, then Durrell is very clearly a character novelist. His paganism revolves around people, emotions, and feelings more than plot and action. Life becomes an inner not outer reality, an art not a science, and man his own master. The latter is exactly what Sappho forgets. Man can atone for his own sins.

Sutcliffe insists upon such a truth in *Quinx*. "Men without awe," he asserts, "will never be wise." And a few lines later, "Ours is perhaps the first civilization which cannot decide if the answers lie in art or in science" (*Quinx*, 174, 175). Notice that Durrell (à la Blanford, Sutcliffe, et al.—ego, alter ego, and id at once?) not only suggests that such a choice can be made by modern man, he also implies that it is a conscious human choice whether we like it or not and that it has been made in the past.

Art is awful—awful in its actuality, its immediacy, and its fleshly reality. It can and does control and determine men's actions. It is a meld of the conscious and unconscious in man, a joining (not an imposition or discovery) of structure and pattern to the chaos of existence. Art is not different from reality here; instead, art is reality and vice versa. Art is identical to the primal power of creation itself, part and parcel of it (Wilde's greatest work of art, remember, was his life—so he insisted). Imitation and Locke's *tabula rasa* are absurd within a Durrellian world.

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The imagination creates, in life as well as art. Great living is as equally structured and patterned by the imagination as is great art. So, tragically and poignantly, we are forced to accuse Sappho of a lack of imagination. The challenges of her life defeated her, and she imitated the patterns of her enemy.

Thus the orgasm is important to Durrell's classicism not just because he is a post-Lawrencian, which he is; overcome by the mystery of sex, which he is; but because Durrell asserts the necessity of a rational control over (and with) those mysteries in a complete and considered statement to which Lawrence never attained. Clea must lose her hand to become a great artist. Darley must become a hermit not just to write a book but to learn how to live amid his fellows. Constance must not only become her own woman (an attainment we can and must question in *Lady Chatterley*), she must be a match for her man, whichever of the many men that may be. Durrell's Constance is dominated, finally, by no man, certainly not Blanford. In fact, she does most of the saving when that is possible. Sebastian and Blanford are only two cases in point.

Durrell insists upon absolute classical balance and rationality. Creation is the constant interpenetration of opposites to form wholly new, actual experience. Mystery and reason, consciousness and unconsciousness, spirituality and sexuality, intellectuality and physicality, self and other, man and woman, suffering and joy; all find themselves reflected narcissistically in their opposites. The orgasm remains the secret of all this seeming chaos. It is primal energy in the creation of matter, compulsion which inevitably moves toward stasis, the final and complete joining of opposites in human experience, the culmination of knowing, mystery and fact at one.

Blanford and Constance make love, we are told, as if their embraces are "extensions of their thoughts" (*Quinx*, 175). Later they ride together in "sweet symbiosis," and alongside a "ravenous blue sea" and under a "heartfelt blue . . . sky," Constance convinces Blanford of the "existence of lovers as philosophers"—"the need for a joint approach to time through the atom of their love" (*Quinx*, 176).

Now, let me pause. If Durrell's paganism is nothing less than the organizing principle of society, and the orgasm is the secret primal center of that organization, and Constance is desperate for philosophic love—the reader might lose track of what is "real" in Durrell. Let's not forget that in Durrell's fictive world as in the actual one, a good fuck is still a good fuck. Durrell insists upon this comic sanity and his note of the need for a "joint" approach to love is a banality unless we also recognize its undercutting humor. Durrell's world is neither heroic nor

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Utopian, neither full of swords and clashing cymbals nor of passive rural philosophers contentedly listening to lowing cows across the dales and congratulating themselves on their final good fortune and wisdom. The Livias of Durrell's world see to this. Remember, Durrell insists upon "the taming of the screw" (*Quinx*, 179).

Nor does Durrell's fiction deny the importance of art as decoration in life. To the contrary, life is decoration upon the unplumbed and unplanned nature of things. Normality exists only in our expectation of it. What is knowable must be repeatable. To the scientist such knowledge is "replication." Life and art are one. In the final narcissism of experience, they imitate and create each other.

At its center then, Durrell's classicism is a refusal to forget—to forget our bodies, our minds, the possibility of freedom, the necessity of community, the constancy of change. It is dogma without fact. It is the coexistence of past and future in the present. Near the end of *Quinx*, Blanford says:

Your consciousness bears witness to the historic *now* which you are living while your memory recalls other *nows*, fading slowly into indistinctness as they move into the prehistory you call the *past*. . . . But . . . in the course of a few years, about seven I think, every cell in the body of this 'I', this individual, has been modified and even replaced. . . . What then is the permanence which you designate as an 'I'? (*Quinx*, 176)

Blanford, here, does not deny constancy or stasis. He merely presents the scientific fact and its artistic analysis. We will not be tomorrow what we are today and yet today is part of what was yesterday. Each cell of our body will either die or change within seven years—a scientific fact. And yet the person, the human animal, retains an identity.

Blanford's final question is rhetorical, and he knows it. Each organism is individuated by its past, by the simple fact that each cell has its own history, because life continues not in the spirit but in the body. All experience, however, is never lost in the flesh because it has never been but in the flesh. Permanence is the continuous act of change—life creating life, man recreating himself out of loneliness and isolation amid the bewildering complexity of a modern world. Like Terence or Sterne, Durrell sees the human comedy in all its poignant fragility. All experience is subjective and, therefore, all knowledge relative. Man's sexuality is at the center of this rollicking chaos whether it be Slawkenbergian noses (Durrell, remember, builds noses in the *Quartet*) or Navarorean whiskers or Julian Merlin falling desperately in love with his (and Felix Charlock's) own creation which/who has the effrontery to

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refuse him. Remember, too, that Charlock's Abel is really a fantastic memory machine, and Iolanthe's desire to be free is merely her birth-right (or machine-right), in any case a product of man's lust to create and recreate, narcissistically, himself.

Think for a moment of how many of Durrell's themes and image patterns revolve around this classical dialogue which man ecstatically conducts with his own image. Narcissism is only one. Aspects of man's constant recreation of himself are found in his desire for freedom, the gnostic refusal of virtue as a moral guide, the recognition of the inevitability of suffering and its possible redemptive qualities, the landscape as "Deus Loci" (both mapped and uncharted), sickness (the English death is but one—physical, spiritual and psychological), the repetition and wholeness of the circle, fiction and art as reality, islands, caves, Buddhism, the heraldic life, the inevitability and need for pattern in all experience. If not endless, the list is almost so. Unterecker even includes peaks and mountains as a rediscovery of lost innocence (Unterecker, 6–7).

To understand and appreciate Lawrence Durrell's achievement, then, requires that we be constantly aware of a paganism which he increasingly presents as a legitimate and increasingly desirable alternative to what Durrell sees as a moribund and virtue-ridden western culture. In classical fashion, Durrell argues for man ascendent, his own creator and master; for joy without guilt, the productive life; and for man within society. The basis of all this is the couple, man and woman in all their mystery and sexual comedy: Darley-Melissa, Nessim-Justine, Clea-Darley, Felix-Benedicta, Merlin-Iolanthe, Sutcliffe-Pia, and Aubrey-Constance. Bruce-Silvie-Piers is in reality a triad of failed couples in which the woman, unlike Constance, is unable to attain her rightful place.

In the final paragraphs of *Quinx*, Sutcliffe and Blanford speak to each other as they have throughout the *Quintet*. "Sex," remarks Sutcliffe, "the human animal's larder." And his double replies, "Yes. Or the fatal power-house. We could do so much with it if we learned the code!" (*Quinx*, 200). And where do we learn the code but from within the pattern itself? For the code is ourselves, our own bodies and emotions and minds. As *Quinx* ends, Durrell, prophet of the flesh and its delights, becomes almost mediievally symbolic. The lovers Constance and Aubrey follow in the procession led by the Prince in a Daimler and the singing gypsy woman who is walking. The cave is marked "Danger," and its first room is vast, "like a cathedral" (of the mind?) Durrell notes. From it radiates a labyrinth of "inner corridors" down which Smergil

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and Quatrefages lead the multitude. The lovers shiver with premonition and in rushes “totally unpredictable” reality.

Love is not Durrell’s religion, as Weigel implies it is when he notes that Justine’s pagan mask becomes a station of the cross in the *Quartet* (Weigel, 99), but it has been the major medium through which Durrell has explored human experience.

The caves and the corridor of the inner self have always been Durrell’s most passionate love. They are the proper study of man as the Greek tragedians well knew. To return to our initial example, Sappho’s tragedy, as well, is always deep within her. “Egoist,” she rages at Minos near the play’s beginning after Diomedes has been carried off by the girls, “You are in love with yourself. Your romance is with your own mind” (*Sappho*, 24). Such self-defeating narcissism is the heart of the tragic protagonist’s fatal flaw. Diomedes dies, he admits, of shame and boredom (*Sappho*, 144–45) while Sappho, herself, tells Kleis, “Come here and look upon the face; / The tortured wicked features of your mother, / . . . washed up / On the bare island of her good intentions” (*Sappho*, 185).

Unwittingly, Sappho has sought virtue rather than human love—the very love from which Diomedes has died. It is “hubris” which destroys Sappho’s life, the classic pride of good intentions, the hubris of Agamemnon, Oedipus, and Antigone which cuts them off so completely from their fellow humans. Better to be dead.

Durrell’s art has been unique in the twentieth century specifically because it has not rebelled but sought its roots. Durrell’s fiction, drama, poetry, criticism, and even travel literature is a modulated blend of classical tragedy and comedy, aesthetic delight, humanistic optimism, and mystic wonder. What Durrell has definitely never been is a self-pitying, romantic cynic, a luxury which poor, tragic Sappho unwittingly allows herself—as wandering mind denies a kiss, the body’s wonder.

¹ Lawrence Durrell, *Sappho* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), p. 15. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Sappho*.

² John Unterecker, *Lawrence Durrell* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1964), p. 19. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as Unterecker.

³ G. S. Fraser, *Lawrence Durrell: A Critical Study* (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 28. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as Fraser.

⁴ John A. Weigel, *Lawrence Durrell* (New York, Dutton, 1966), pp. 18–27. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as Weigel.

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⁵ Harry T. Moore, *The World of Lawrence Durrell* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1962), p. x.

⁶ Alan Warren Friedman, *Lawrence Durrell and The Alexandria Quartet* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1970), pp. 6, 8.

⁷ Ray Morrison, "'With His Art Like a Vase': 'Fangbrand'—An Heraldic Life as Poetry," *Deus Loci*, 5, No. 1 (Sept. 1981), p. 4.

⁸ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1917), pp. 124–25. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as Pater.

⁹ Lawrence Thornton, "Narcissism and Selflessness in *The Alexandria Quartet*," *Deus Loci*, 1, No. 4 (June 1978), p. 17.

¹⁰ Lawrence Durrell, *Nunquam* (New York: Dutton, 1970), p. 317.

¹¹ Lawrence Durrell, *The Ikons* (New York: Dutton, 1967), p. 44.

¹² Lawrence Durrell, *The Dark Labyrinth* (New York: Dutton, 1964), p. 256.

¹³ John Keats, *The Poetical Works*, ed. H. W. Garrod (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958), p. 304.

¹⁴ Lawrence Durrell, *Quinx* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 13. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Quinx*.

¹⁵ Lawrence Durrell, *Monsieur* (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 142. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Monsieur*.

“The Artist at His Papers”: Durrell, Egypt, and the Poetry of Exile

BY ROGER BOWEN

. . . though Durrell was by no means unaffected by the melancholy of our time, that did not express itself in him, as it does in so many of us, as sag and hesitation.¹

—G. S. Fraser

There is something seasoned and, indeed, combative about Durrell's Egyptian exile. There were other writers who shared these years of "alienation and distance";² some, like Terence Tiller and Robin Fedden, had been there since 1939, while Bernard Spencer had arrived from Greece in January of 1941, and Olivia Manning's flight from Piraeus, on Good Friday of that year, was barely ahead of the enemy. From the fall of Greece to the end of the war, at different times, the soldiers came: Keith Douglas, Hamish Henderson, John Waller, Ian Fletcher, John Gawsworth, and G. S. Fraser. And it is Fraser who identifies the unique energy of Durrell the artist in this wartime community of writer-exiles. Perhaps, "rootless by background and inheritance,"³ he had an edge, for there was a prologue to Egypt, and a substantial one. The poet who had begun "in idleness" beneath the shadows of the Himalayas and had endured Pudding Island from childhood to young manhood, discovered Greece and home in 1935: "Here worlds were confirmed in him."⁴ And war denied them ruthlessly: "Bombers bursting like pods go down/ And the seed of Man stars/ This landscape, ancient but no longer known" ("Cities, Plains and People," 172). And so he came ashore in a new land, with Corfu, Athens, the islands, Kalamata, and Crete behind him. Egypt was not chosen, but neither did it become a prison. Durrell, romantic

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adventurer and romantic artist, took it in his stride, creating a role for himself as the exiled writer, and when he returned to Greece early in 1945, he took more of Egypt with him than any of his colleagues. *The Alexandria Quartet* was in embryo, and a considerable body of poems had been inspired by the years spent in Cairo and Alexandria.

In June 1941 when Durrell disembarked in Alexandria, Greece had become part of occupied Europe. Two years later this adopted homeland was memorialized in Durrell's first major volume of poetry, *A Private Country* (1943). *Cities, Plains, and People* (1946) contains his Egyptian poems, while Greek landscape and culture continue to be celebrated in this volume and beyond. If Greece is to be remembered as a land of peace, as a place free from the pressures of contemporary history, then Egypt is by no means identified as a country overshadowed by war and confinement. Durrell devises his own strategies for escaping the troubled present: he transforms place and time; he develops a mythology of place and personality, transcending the historical, and in so doing anticipates some of the methods of the post-war *Quartet*.⁵

The sense of urgent historical drama is absent from Durrell's scattered prose accounts of his Egyptian experience: "The country basked in its fictitious neutrality, the shops were crammed, the cinemas packed; the Allied armies marooned here sharpened their claws in preparation for the battles to come, but in fact it seemed extraordinary to live in such oriental splendour with a battlefield which was only an hour's drive away."⁶ He recalls the occasional raid on Alexandria's harbor, the "snarl of tanks" one might hear after midnight in the streets of Cairo. Despite the general accuracy of this account (most of Durrell's civilian companions would have shared this view), there is much that it underestimated. Because of the sensitivity of his Alexandria post, to which he was ordered just before the decisive Alamein battle, Durrell, Head of the Information Office, was closely in touch with the precarious hold the British had on Egypt at that critical moment. The city and its people were expecting Rommel, and some of them were preparing to welcome him as a liberator. The man who had fled Greece in a fishing boat with his wife and child, had been bombed in Kalamata and Crete, was not many miles or hours away from becoming a prisoner-of-war, or a fatality. Yet nothing of this atmosphere or context finds its way into the literature; only later in the *Quartet* will wartime Alexandria and its dangers be directly confronted, and then only as a surreal backdrop to the continuing private discoveries of the fictional protagonists. Durrell's poems also eschew the subject of war, except for

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a handful of oblique references and "Near El Alamein," which does not even stand alone but is the second half of a work titled "Two Poems in Basic English." The first of these, "Ships. Islands. Trees," seems to belong in spirit to the lyric world of *A Private Country*:⁷

These ships, these islands, these simple trees
Are our rewards in substance, being poor.
This earth a dictionary is
To the root and growth of seeing,
And to the servant heart a door. (141)

When Durrell embraces "these living/ Instruments of space," he celebrates the essence of Greece, but the "order and . . . music" which he must conjure from memory may well be, as he concludes: "Too private for the reason or the pen;/ Too simple even for the heart's surprise" (142). He recognizes the fragility, the interiority of the Greece he possesses as an exile. In the second poem, "Near El Alamein," the writer inhabits a different world, one which necessarily redefines the first:

This rough field of sudden war—
This sand going down to the sea, going down,
Was made without the approval of love,
By a general death in the desire for living. (142)

If, as Thomas Mann had said of his times, "the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms," then Durrell, like Yeats, does not care to know. His disdain for that "chilly currency of thought"⁸ which helped characterize poetry in the 1930s is familiar enough. Here he maintains an appropriate distance from "war and war's alarms." Indeed, his aloofness has its analogue in Yeats's contempt for the mere localities of history, the "ass-back" trek of civilization, and his corresponding faith in the transcending power of art; but the tone and phrasing are reminiscent of Auden, who had given his own "dishonest decade" full attention, while Yeats stubbornly turned his back on it in poems like "Lapis Lazuli." Durrell catalogues and summarizes the waste of modern warfare with a casual objectivity: "old houses . . . / Burnt guns, maps and firing:/ All the apparatus of man's behaviour" (142). The sense of place is rendered simply as a "rough field of sudden war," localized only by the conjunction of sand and sea. But the poem is moved by a lament for the loss of human spirit and creative impulse. Durrell sees warfare (at this time and any other) as an activity in opposition to the energy of love—as, indeed, a manifestation of the death wish. Mankind can do better. It is an energy released with the "approval of love" that he sees as surviving, much as Yeats finds reason

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to celebrate at the close of "Lapis Lazuli." Durrell's poem turns on the line, "But ideas and language do not go," and the observations which conclude the poem represent the voice of the poet, a voice which, by the very nature of art, rebuilds:

Men walking here, thinking of houses,
Gardens, or green mountains or beliefs:
Units of the dead in these living armies,
Making comparison of this bitter heat,
And the living sea, giving up its bodies,
Level and dirty in the mist,
Heavy with sponges and the common error. (142)

The battlefield is contemplated and transformed by an imagination making use of "ideas and language." The "living sea" is there at the close, tainted and spoiled by man. The final images, comprising this "common error," serve as a rebuke to mankind, but the sea lives on as energy and will, remaking itself, "giving up its bodies." An intellectual and moral disdain softens into compassion without sacrificing distance, without documenting war's actuality. This is, clearly, a poem trying very hard not to be a "war poem," an error of the times Durrell found all too common and wholly suspect.

John Waller recalls a letter from Durrell on this subject: "I think all this war-poet stuff is bogus and vulgar really . . . the only kind of work worth while is work that wears no uniform but its own merits—and dressing prose or poetry in pips and crowns is from my own point of view a bad show."⁹ What he objected to was the rash of amateur poetasting which the war in the Middle East had certainly prompted and which some editors and publishers had enshrined, in anthologies like *Poems from the Forces* (1941) and *Oasis* (1943). (Individual artists, like Keith Douglas or John Gawsworth, he would exempt from this classification.) The rationale behind *Personal Landscape* is very much a part of the view Durrell expresses here. His co-editor, Robin Fedden, in his introduction to *Personal Landscape: An Anthology of Exile* (1945) commented on the "lamentable level of various Middle East anthologies of 'war poetry,'" ¹⁰ while in the last number of the journal, the editors summed up the magazine's significance, one which lay above wars and the noise of history: "For three years it has provided a vehicle, the only one available in English, for serious poets and critics in the Middle East. It has also, at a time when propaganda colours all perspective, emphasized those 'personal landscapes' which lie obstinately outside national and political frontiers."¹¹

Durrell's own quest for appropriate "personal landscapes" while he

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lived as a refugee in Egypt, and while he endured the threat of a spreading European war, led him to a strategy of reinvention which cut across the barriers of time and place, creating an aesthetic present which scoffed at the rigidities of history. Durrell's Middle East, his middle sea, his Egypt, are not described, reported, or represented, nor are they used as a simple springboard for nostalgia, but are remade by a storyteller with an eye for character, myth, the timeless spirit of place, and the palimpsest of cultural history. The future author of the *Quartet* is already trying his hand at a special kind of fiction.

* * * * *

One way of looking at Durrell's transition from Greece to Egypt, as it may be reflected in his poetry, is to see it in terms of completion and incompleteness. Greece has represented unity and harmony, but now, because it is lost, it becomes a story in search of a conclusion. Take, for example, the enigmatic little poem "Pearls" from *Cities, Plains, and People*. In the manner of a fairy-tale, the poem tells the story of a Lady who gives her pearls back to the sea for ten summers and winters to restore their life and lustre. But the lovely neck which bore them, we are told, "Becomes one day the target for an Axe," and we are left contemplating an unfinished tale, searching for a lost element. All we have is the

... fragment of a voice ...
Like this unbroken coast,
Like this half-drawn landscape,
Like this broken torso of a poem. (125)

The tale becomes Greece which becomes the poem. The unfinished and open narrative is to become Durrell's *forte* in his post-war fiction. This aesthetic strategy may well have its source in Durrell's unfinished Greek adventure. Though one can, certainly, identify a predisposition in his experimental *Black Book* (1938), the broken biographical narrative which Durrell suffered in 1941 could well have validated choices he made in the context of his art.

Durrell's most sustained and emphatic tributes to the memory of Greece are "Letter to Seferis the Greek" and "Matapan," both from *A Private Country*. Here he acknowledges more clearly than elsewhere the integrity of his Greek connection, the break in that relationship, and the hope for a restoration, for the narrative to continue. "Letter to Seferis the Greek" was first published in 1941, the year of Durrell's escape from that conquered country. In the form of a letter to a fellow poet

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and fellow exile, it pays tribute to Greece and to friendship. It is the poem that unifies and gives purpose to the volume; though Greece has been his "private country," Durrell, in a sense, gives it back, properly, to one of its true sons, and then joins hands to celebrate a community and a cause. The usually vatic Durrell does not become the civic poet; through friendship he captures the essence of a people and their land, with no direct political or historical contextualizing.

Durrell reconstructs, iconographically, the idea and image of Greece: the olive, whether a mole on a young girl's throat, or the "olive in the blood"; the rocks and stones; the asphodels and swallows; the "enormous blue" of its "curving sky"; the flowing water. "All these things," we are told, are "simply Greece." Those who can no longer enjoy this quintessence are numbered:

Those who went in all innocence,
Whom the wheel disfigured: whom
Charity will not revisit or repair,
The innocent who fell like apples. (100)

The enduring energy, as so often with Durrell, is seen in terms of love: "Calling all lovers everywhere in all stations/ Who lie on the circumference of ungiven kisses" (101). And within this broad embrace lie the loyalty and devotion of two friends. The direct address to Seferis comes in the last two stanzas:

O my friend, history with all her compromises
Cannot disturb the circuit made by this,
Alone in the house, a single candle burning
Upon a table in the whole of Greece. (102)

The "single candle," analogous to the "affirming flame" with which Auden concludes "September 1, 1939," plainly symbolizes the hope which this poem strives toward; the powerful currents of elegy and nostalgia are disciplined in this call to spiritual arms. The first two lines of the last stanza—"Your letter of the 4th was no surprise./ So Tonio had gone? He will have need of us" (102)—widen the sense of community and bring the personal fellowship into focus at the same time. The final image—"The stirring seed of Nostradamus' rose"—solidifies the expectation of survival and growth, and does so with the imprimatur of the prophet. Durrell, once again, enters the "heraldic universe" in order to confirm the world in which he must live.

"Matapan" bore originally the subtitle, "Notes for an unfinished poem." It is, in fact, beautifully finished; what is unfinished is Durrell's relationship with Greece. This poem perfectly illustrates the tension between Greece as a unified experience and idea, and the actuality of a

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lost world; between the body whole and the "broken torso." Cape Matapan was the last landfall on mainland Greece as Durrell sailed in the open caïque from Kalamata to Crete. It was here, as he recalls in *The Greek Islands* (1978), that the village turned out to fête the refugees, slaughtering the last two lambs, laying tables in the main street, and filling their glasses with wine. "As dusk began to fall, we took our leave of this little far-away village, cut off from everywhere by its ring of mountains. They waved us goodbye with the same smiling certainty as they had shown all day. The sun was just below the rim of the horizon, the world was sinking through veil after veil of violet dusk towards the sheltering darkness."¹²

This world has been seen once and can be seen no more:

Unrevisited perhaps forever
Southward from the capes of smoke
Where past and present to the waters are one
And the peninsula's end points out
Three fingers down the night. (116)

This place and time meant "An end of everything known/ A beginning of water." This became a moment suspended, forever being itself, a matrix of loss, fate, and reshaped identity:

*Here sorrow and beauty shared
Like time and place an eternal relation,
Matapan* (116)

And so Matapan becomes a mantra; its name evokes not simply a spot on Greece's eccentric seaboard, but all of Greece, all memories of Greece:

Standing alone on the hills
Saw all Greece, the human
Body of this sky suspending a world
Within a crystal turning,
Guarded by the green wicks of cypresses. (118)

And set in this universal landscape, as the poem closes, are two figures whose indivisibility serves to secure the integrity of this scene, not simply as an image of a recent past, but also of a certain future:

Far out on the blue
Like notes of music on a page
The two heads: the man and his wife.
They are always there.

It is too far to hear the singing. (118)

Reminiscent of Hardy's "maid and her wight" from "In Time of

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'The Breaking of Nations,' " they stand for human endurance in the face of history's often cruel march; and with more zeal than Hardy could usually muster, they stand for the "*lover/ . . . contained by love*," and the survival of a universal power manifested in the individual. The eternal bond represented by these two figures duplicates Durrell's own bond with the land he was forced to leave, and a pact with the future in which such things can still be celebrated. This is a farewell poem, an elegy—"a key turned in the heart, a letter/ Posted under the door of an empty house" (116)—and the final line necessarily separates the poet from the world he insists will preserve itself. He is *not there*; but if he is too far away to hear the singing, he knows it is going on. The harmony, the completeness of it all survives, even if his witnessing of it must remain on trust.

To turn from this fully drawn landscape, at once geographical and spiritual, to Alexandria, that "Ash-heap of four cultures," is to say farewell to a world whose integrity cannot be duplicated, it can only haunt: "O my friends,/ Surely these nightly visitations/ Of islands in one's sleep must soon be over?" (127). This is the voice of exile in "Conon in Alexandria"; it is the second chapter of an exile which had first been identified in "Conon in Exile."

An author's note identifies Conon as "an imaginary Greek philosopher . . . with whom I occasionally identify myself." Durrell continues: "he is one of my masks, Melissa is another; I want my total poetic work to add up as a kind of tapestry of people, some real, some imaginary. Conon is real" (107). This final contradiction is typical of Durrell's serious mischief. Where the "imaginary" is "real" is the "heraldic universe," which is the realm where logic is transcended, where the artist can create. The five sections of "Conon in Exile" articulate a coherence and confidence which are lacking in the later "Conon in Alexandria," though the subject matter—the easy co-existence of asceticism and sensuality—seems perfectly appropriate for that city's history. Conon's internal exile, on the island of Andros, prompts him to look back on his life and measure its accomplishments and shortcomings. He does this, in part, in terms of his bibliography—from the ballads to *The Universe* to *The Art of Marriage* to *Of Love and Death*—and, running parallel to it, his sexual conquests, those who slept with his words. Coitus and cognition have ruled his life. He remains an "old man with a skinful of wine/ Living from pillow to poke under a vine" (108). He has been one with Ariadne and rests secure because the "past harms no one who lies close to the Gods." The poem's third section provides the most lyrical chapter in this amatory chronicle:

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You who pass the islands will perhaps remember
 The lovely Ion, harmless, patient and in love.
 Our quarrels disturbed the swallows in the eaves,
 The wild bees could not work in the vine;
 Shaken and ill, one of true love's experiments,
 It was she who lay in the stone bath dry-eyed,
 Having the impression that her body had become
 A huge tear about to drop from the eye of the world.
 We never learned that marriage is a kind of architecture,
 The nursery virtues were missing, all of them,
 So nobody could tell us why we suffered. (108)

The tone of dispassionate compassion, reminiscent of Auden in "Musée des Beaux Arts," looks forward to the *Quartet* and the voice of the narrator who performs constantly as the playful and curious philosopher rather than the moralist. The tale told here is one of sexual and metaphysical enquiry, candidly reconstructed in an exile that is secure and not a source of discontent, for the "blue Aegean" surrounds him; it "forever/ Washes and pardons and brings us home" (108). The voice of Conon substantizes Greece once more, suggesting an eternal source of redemption. Adventure and exploration define the speaker's memories of books written and women possessed and loved. It is a journey of mind and body.

The language of exile spoken in "Conon in Alexandria" is very different; a unified culture and experience are lost. This is the "ash-heap," the layered world of the Levant and the merchants, scholars, and soldiers who left their ghosts behind in the city which the philosopher must now inhabit. By employing the alter ego of Conon in this context, Durrell creates "heraldic" freedoms for himself. He escapes the pressure of present time, though the four years which bind Conon to Alexandria happen to duplicate Durrell's experience in Egypt. He escapes the limits of self-consciousness, the unease of the poet who speaks for himself and his own separation. He creates a fictive speaker from another era who is not embarrassed to admit to "writing those interminable whining letters" (127), not hesitant to reiterate his loss of Greece, where the "almond-candles and the statues burn" (128). To create *another* exile is to escape from one's own; the path of invention is the path of escape.

And so Conon, employing the fluent economy of a writer's notebook, defines his city of captivity, beginning with a dour topographical image—"Bounded by Mareotis, a salt lake,/ On which the winter rain rings and whitens" (127)—and moving on to reflections and aphorisms, "workpoints" of a sort, which illustrate the psychological

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dimensions of this slow passage of "four Februaries" (128). We are made aware of the recipients of Conon's letters, fragments from the other side of a dialogue, which suggest more powerfully than any coherent narrative the pain of separation and the solitude endured "on this coast of torn-out lighthouses" (129). This documented communication with a lost world only serves to accentuate the loss; it is worse than silence. Darley's desolation is prefigured in such images as these: "A gown stained at the arm-pits by a woman's body./ A letter unfinished because the ink gave out" (129). And the tone of the *Quartet* is captured in the aphorism which concludes the poem: "'Music is only love, looking for words'" (129).

"Alexandria" is a far more personal confrontation with the exile's way; this is now the modern Levantine metropolis isolated by the currents of war, but in the voice of this century's poet there is still the ghost of Conon, of Cavafy's "Exiles," of all writers-in-exile. The poem begins with an acknowledgment of fellowship, allusive and anonymous though it is. The artist-speaker presides over a city of friendship, of need, love and loss; and he dedicates his poem in the opening stanza:

To the lucky now who have lovers or friends,
 Who move to their sweet undiscovered ends,
 Or whom the great conspiracy deceives,
 I wish these whirling autumn leaves:
 Promontories splashed by the salty sea,
 Groaned on in darkness by the tram
 To horizons of love or good luck or more love—
 As for me I now move
 Through many negatives to what I am. (154)

At the heart of the experience sketched here is the developing artist. The passage "through many negatives" to a new identity brings to mind the progress of Darley in the *Quartet*. Already Durrell is imposing his own narrative scheme on the city and its "characters"—"B. with his respect for the Object, and D./ Searching in sex like a great pantry for jars/ Marked 'Plum and apple'"—who become "objects" for his "study" and "love," this varied sea-wrack from the tides of war (154). The poem explores the same evocative levels of memory Durrell was later to uncover in his prose narratives inspired by Alexandria. He informs place with atmosphere and the mystery and suggestiveness of lives lived and loves experienced, and perhaps lost. Fact and fiction, the "real" and the "imaginary," are kept in a state of flux. "B.," for example, is Bernard Spencer, Durrell's friend and co-editor of *Personal Landscape*, but in the pause and fetch of the poem, he becomes a storyteller's

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character, one among many.¹³ Yet more stories, stories untold, lie behind the images of the city's outward face—the wind against the sea-wall, the lighthouse, the sirens from the harbor—and the images of enclosure where the private rhythms of the city may be detected: the “furnished rooms” in which lovers and friends come and go, in fact or in imagination, and where the script of life is revised constantly; and the “poky hot/ Tenth floor room” where the student is “some girl's unquiet ghost” (155). The city is a composite of solitudes; even the “lovers at their quarrel in the sheets” suggest separate lives. The final image of solitude is the “artist at his papers/ Up there alone, upon the alps of night” (155). *That* species of isolation is the source of the poem, and it separates ultimately the “I” from the companionship he feels the need to celebrate. This “I,” this master of ceremonies, can call up the “autumn leaves” and the “great pure wind,” but his is an austere presence. Intimacy is the object of his attention, the subject of his narrative, but it is not confessed. The exiled poet retreats to authorship, of his life and the lives of those he moved with; with Conon he had retreated even further. Yet this retreat both enlarges and enriches his world.

Alexandria, in both these poems, becomes a place waiting to be left; it is a repository of memories, memories of itself, of its characters, and it is a place where the artist practices his craft and tests the limits of his exploration and invention. Alexandria, in Durrell's hands, is a composite of private and historical mythologies, a story woven through time. In his Egyptian poems Durrell answers the crisis of exile with the patience *and* the restlessness of the storyteller, forging new links, remaking the old, disguising the present, imagining a future. He takes possession of Egypt as none of his fellow writers does; his own exuberant range, his chameleon persona, overcome the stricture and the despair. To concur with G. S. Fraser, there is no “sag” or “hesitation.” His poetry of the period lives a *separate* life, as his fiction was to do later.

Durrell's one attempt, in *Cities, Plains, and People*, to possess the region in one large historical embrace is less successful. “Levant,” one feels, is a dutiful endeavor. The tone is that of a moral historian affecting amorality in order to come to terms with a mercantile culture just outside the reach of sympathy. This is not Ionia, nor the Aegean. Durrell is unusually tight-lipped, lacking that balance of irony and compassion he had detected in an “auto-review” of his first volume, published in *Personal Landscape*, as well as the “Browningesque larkiness”¹⁴ which energizes his “mask” poems. We listen here only to

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an alternately stern and diffident omniscient narrator. There is no sense of discovery because the poem is concerned ultimately with the "human type 'Levant,'" something created and "fixed" in the stream of orientalist discourse. The final line, separated from the body of the last stanza—"Something money or promises can buy" (144)—is merely a gloss on that "human type." The historical path is traced, therefore, with a sense of inevitability. Arabian merchants begin this chronicle with "Gum, oats and syrup," their ships and men "Evoking nothing from the sea but more/ And more employ" (143). Trade and profit is the thread which runs through this account—"coming and going with their talk of bales"—and the details are catalogued in two's and three's, in predictable patterns. Oats and gum and syrup recur; and "the quills of Jews invented credit." The English, the Dutch mariners bring their cargoes south, but "In manners taught them nothing much/ Beyond the endurance in the vile" (143). Spain enters the picture, while bastard offspring of Portuguese and Greek survive to "speak and smile," but these racial and linguistic accretions seem to amount to nothing of consequence. The role of Alexandria is the subject of the third stanza; here is the destination and end-product of Levantine culture, this "ant-hill for grammarians," this place for foreigners, built on other trades, on "Boys, women and drugs." Now the lading lists become "ribbons and wands and rash/ Patents for sex and feathers,/ Sweets for festivals and deaths" (143). Levantine history comes to a rest on this "spit of sand," born here by a "promiscuous sea." The lingering judgment is: "Nothing changes." Indeed, the poem from its first line, or entry, hardly raises the possibility. There is, surprisingly for Durrell, no animating curiosity at work. In "Levant" Durrell is perhaps reaching for the detachment and irony of Cavafy's historical poems, but he falls short. Durrell is, however, consistently impressive as his more selective eye succeeds in rendering the Egypt he knew, a part only of the Levant.

"Greek Church, Alexandria," for example, chooses one element and one artifact in the Levantine tapestry: the Greek presence in Alexandria and the orthodox faith which sustained it. The poem begins with the worshippers and what it is that has drawn them here, and so suggests an enquiry into the nature of faith. This is to be more than a Baedeker entry:

The evil and the good seem undistinguished,
Indeed all half asleep; their coming was
No eloquent proposition of natures
Too dense for material ends, quartered in pain.

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But a propitiation by dreams of belief
A relief from the chafing ropes of thought. (144)

Appropriately for a poet dedicated to the pursuit of experience beyond the principle of "causality," what is highlighted here is the solace sought and found in "dreams of belief"; the church offers its own way into an "heraldic universe," free of logic's law. The building itself next receives attention, though the poem resists the purely objective and descriptive modes:

Piled high in Byzance like a treasure-ship
The church heels over, sinking in sound
And yellow lamplight while the arks and trolleys
And blazing crockery of the orthodox God
Make it a fearful pomp for peasants,
A sorcery to the black-coated rational,
To the town-girl an adventure, an adventure. (144)

Architectural structure is transformed into the hull of a ship; then the whole becomes a *son et lumière*, adding to the poem's metamorphic energy. Peasant, "black-coated rational," and "town-girl" all respond to different aspects of the church's theatre; in effect, the members of this congregation choose the performance they wish to see, yet all of them, we are told later, merge "in a single sea-shell." The "boiling" and "conniving" arguments of theologians are ultimately irrelevant; it is a matter of surrender to the magic of faith and possibility. The experience grows in intensity for the faithful as the ritual finds a voice:

The altar has opened like a honeycomb;
An erect and flashing deacon like a despot howls.
Surely we might ourselves exhale
Our faults like rainbows on this incense? (145)

The poet's presence up to this point is all but invisible; no one, hatless, stands in awkward reverence to record the scene. But in the final stanza presence of a kind is signalled through another: "the old Greek barber/ Who cut my hair this morning." It is this last identified worshipper whose "dream of belief" closes the poem. Moved by a hunger to be more serious he stands, a "window-bound and awkward/ Child at this sill of pomp." We leave him "Smelling the miracle and softly sighing" (145). Faith, in the end, is registered on the senses. The appearance of the speaker's barber has a curious effect on a poem which has maintained a tactful distance between speaker and subject. This distance has granted the subject its special aura, has allowed us to explore its mystery, to respond to an interior spirit of place. The barber returns us to the reality of the Greek community, and one to which the

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speaker belongs, if only by proxy. The church and the faith which it represents connect Durrell with a lost homeland, and in that sensuous last line there is a connection made between poet and subject which transcends the apparent limits of the poem. "Greek Church, Alexandria," is another elegy for Greece, much as Cavafy's evocative lyric, "In Church," honors the race and the heritage. What is especially remarkable about this poem is the way in which it conveys a sense of the customary. The magic and wonder are part of the "phantom city," the ancient imprint of Byzantine civilization, but this is also "quotidian"¹⁵ Alexandria, and the poet has made himself very familiar with it.

Durrell, more than any other of his fellow writers-in-exile, suggests in his poems a resident rather than a traveler or visitor. He seems to absorb more; he seems to have been "there"—wherever "there" may be—a long time. He exudes a knowledge that is at once broad and intimate; he *seems* to belong. And if he doesn't quite, then he will invent someone who does. Durrell appropriates Egypt even if he has not chosen it.

The range and confidence of that appropriation are particularly evident in his sequence, "Eight Aspects of Melissa." As I have already noted, Durrell describes Melissa as one of his "masks," but her presence in the first of these poems, as one addressed by another speaker, seems to contradict that identification. She does not appear to "speak" her poems as Conon does. The opening stanza of "By the Lake" suggests why:

If seen by many minds at once your image
As in a prism falling breaks itself,
Or looking upwards from a gleaming spoon
Defies: a smile squeezed up and vanishing
In roundels of diversion like the moon. (146)

The prismatic identity of Melissa is a model for the "eight aspects" which constitute this poem, and one can imagine "consequential data" for eight more, more "roundels of diversion." The sensuous enigma that is the woman addressed here—"This dark soft eye, so liquid now and hoarse/ With pleasure"—is a part of Alexandria's landscape, beside Mareotis, and a source of dreams, speculations, and questions. The final stanza sets the tone for the poems that follow, for dictions that lie within fictions. Melissa's tangible presence, a "real" person in a "real" place in a sense that only Durrell can employ, unlocks a storyteller's art. She is the poem's muse.

"The Adepts" and "Petron, the Desert Father" sink down into the layers of history that keep Alexandria eternal, and add to the catalogue

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of stories found in Cavafy's poems. In "Petron," Mareotis, "This dense yellow lake," provides yet again its singular spirit of place, while the city itself—"The elegant psychotics on their couches/ In Alexandria, hardly tempted him,/ With talk of business, war and lovely clothes" (149)—belongs to history, to Cavafy, and to Durrell. From Petron's day to Nessim's, scarcely a word or a sensation need be changed. "The Encounter" breathes the very atmosphere of *Justine*, a remembrance of lover and love past, fastidiously reconstructed, each leaf of memory adding to the pain and the pleasure. The dialogue—"Our denials are only gestures—can we help it?"—exudes the languid *douceur* of Darley's narratives-to-be, and the sensuous particulars, "The cool muslin dress shaken with flowers," give the poem the texture of a known story, of a world familiar, long familiar to the narrator, and through him we find ourselves persuaded that these personal landmarks are second nature to us as well. The loss, the figure of loss, captured in the last stanza, concludes a personal elegy which has transcended the personal. "She" becomes all lost loves, a metaphor for displacement and exile:

Your figure forever in the same place,
 Same town and country, sorting letters
 On a green table from many foreign cities,
 The long hare's features, the remarkable sad face. (149)

The final "aspect" of Melissa, "A Prospect of Children," is a contemplation of the psychology and anthropology of childhood, by a "watcher at the window" who studies children playing in a public garden. "These gruesome little artists of the impulse" demonstrate the complexity of their innocence in their anarchic games, their nursery sleep, and so anticipate the "duller opiate" of their mature lives. It is an unsentimental analysis, though not without a tired compassion, as much for the watcher himself who is surely "Trapped in the same limitation of his growth/ And yet not envying them their childhood/ Since he endured his own?" (152). The poem looks back to the first "aspect" in that "By the Lake" illustrated a world the child may have to look forward to, a game as anarchic as any he may well be impelled to play.

What secures this shuffled pack of poems at the close is that "watcher at the window,/ Writing letters, smoking up there alone" (152): the artist, whose solitary eye has seen and created it all, filling up the emptiness of exile. The same artist, in his solitude, marshalled the memories and faces in "Alexandria." His presence is hinted at, too, at the close of "Mareotis," where the wind which blows by the lake "touches once again/ The melancholy elbow cheek and paper" (130). In "Conon in Alexandria" the exile is forced to confess at the end of his

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myriad reflections: "I have passed all this day in what they would call patience./ Not writing, alone in my window, with my flute . . ." (129).

A significant number of poems in *Cities, Plains, and People* evoke this image of the lonely vigil of the artist, while others explore the worlds of writers from the past. "On First Looking into Loeb's Horace," for example, is a dialogue—"I found your Horace with the writing in it" (109)—between the speaker and the possessor of the text, in which the subject, Horace, his life and art, becomes the object of commentary and analysis. The owner of the book, at mid-point and at the close, provides an "interlinear" which is further supplemented by the speaker's own marginalia. (In its small way it anticipates the "great interlinear" of *Balthazar* and brings into play the larger question of textual "truth" and the infinite possibilities of interpretation and perspective.) Horace appears as "a solitary at an upper window/ Revising metaphors for the winter sea" (109), ignorant of these estimations of him, so many centuries after his death. His own text is seen in terms of "pose," "disguise," and "escape," and Horace the "liar" is exposed by a distant reader in turn created by a distant writer. "Upon the flyleaf" is a judgment which concludes the poem, one which touches on the frailty and strength of the artist:

'Fat, human and unloved,
And held from loving by a sort of wall,
Laid down his books and lovers one by one,
Indifference and success had crowned them all.' (111)

In poems like this, and in "Byron," "La Rochefoucauld," and "Poggio," Durrell finds an affirmation in the examples of other artists. His own exile is, in a sense, made more secure by these invocations of the lives and work of others. His identity as an artist is somehow validated by their examples and by *his* example as an interpreter, a recreator, and in the case of "Byron," as a mime.

This poem begins with an image of trees "rapping/ At . . . empty casements" (120), blown by an unfriendly wind, one which blows in "Alexandria," "Mareotis," and in the *Quartet*; it is a familiar trope for exile. Byron gradually emerges as the poem's speaker, though he at first announces himself in the third person, as an invention of himself. This is Byron at Missolonghi, lending his support to the Greek cause of independence. But here is little heroism or honor: "In this bad opera landscape/ Trees, fevers and quarrels/ Spread like sores" (121). Durrell's own war and his own Greece are here; behind the voice of the nineteenth-century poet and the reassuring vigil of the loyal Fletcher, lies the specter of "this brute age," which is in the 1940s what it was in

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the 1820s. If Byron bids farewell to his poem as "A message in a bottle dropped at sea" (123), then so does Durrell writing in one age as he recreates another. The poem is not a simple historical recreation, however; in giving Byron a voice, Durrell presents a composite of masks and identities—"A disguise for a style in a new dress"—a veritable model for the strategy of masks he proposes in the explanatory note attached to "Conon in Exile." Byron is an attractive figure for Durrell not just because of Greece and her fate, then and now, but because this writer, above all others, was a genius in the art of self-invention, a truly prismatic personality. In the stress of Durrell's own struggle as a refugee, as a writer besieged by war, *other* writers with their armory of deceptions, inventions, and artifice offer an intriguing opportunity. Through them he peoples his own world even more variously. In "La Rochefoucauld" the speaker confesses the pattern of his amatory conquests, in terms which stress the *art* of deception, of seduction, and identify the lover as maker of fictions:

Yes, everywhere I sorted the betraying
Motive, point by point designed
This first detective-story of the heart,
Judge, jury, victim, all were in my aspect,
Pinned on the clear notation of the mind—
I primed them like an actor in a part. (124)

Though the writer in this case is forced to admit failure, to see the extent of the "waste" and "lack" of his life, the quest that has been that life authenticates him. Set against the "portrait" which "always seemed/ Somehow faked," the life is still moved by an energy: "Though love is not the word I want/ Yet it will have to do. There is no other" (124).

* * * * *

The "melancholy" of life in those troubled years, 1941 to 1945, Durrell was only too well aware of, but rarely, as we have seen, does he offer any concentrated expression of it. In this crucial "Egyptian" volume, *Cities, Plains, and People*, "In Europe," his "Recitative for a Radio Play," does give a sharp portrait of Europe's mid-century tragedy, dissolving Durrell's own refugee identity in a universal depiction of uprootedness and loss. The three voices of the man, woman, and old man, the sound of drum and bells, the stomp and grunt of the dancing bear, all suggest the timeless suffering of war, the black record of this most civilized of continents. The chanting dialogue uttered by these anonymous travelers renders the experience in

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expressionistic terms. But there is no Mother Courage to provide a focal point and to give a name to suffering and survival. Instead we have a primitive chorus, the pace of a death march, and a summation of loss. From island to island, frontier to frontier, from season to season, the journey is made and the "refugee habit" is learned. As death and destruction are encountered along the way, distinction between "the just and the unjust" (136) is lost; the spirit of place, the knowledge of home is lost. And there is "No time for love, no room for love" (138). All that is left is a catalogue of fragments: "A whistle, a box, a shawl, a cup" (139). Nowhere else is the sense of a contemporary waste land so starkly conveyed. Although "All Europe" is mapped out, from Holland to Russia to Albania, and although the "refugee habit" unites all nationalities and all ages, the dedication of this work to Elie Papadimitriou suggests once again the memory of a particular lost homeland. Greece is invoked twice, once by the woman and once by the old man; the Axis occupation of that country appears to be, over and again, the central meaning of the war for Durrell. "In Europe" first appeared in the Cairo journal *Citadel* in October of 1942, a perilous month in the desert campaign. But for all this there is something affirmative about its clarity and economy, its deliberate artifice of form. There is no "hesitation" here either; Durrell remains the maker, objectifying, allegorizing, emptying current history of all but its essential elements. The result is cathartic and strangely pure; far, surely, from the defeatism which Derek Stanford identified, not long after the war was over.¹⁷

From Kalamata to Alexandria Durrell faced a world of brutal change, of flight and danger. Egypt brought moments of threat during the Alamein "flap," but was largely an extended period of house arrest, cut off from the familiar and the cherished. But Durrell armored himself, as an artist, and claimed new territory. He faced down this uncertain world with a battery of inventions and strategies, recreating landscapes and cities, cultures, personalities "real" and "imaginary." Between 1935 and 1945 Durrell was both Mediterranean resident and castaway. The loss of freedom which the second role implies never quite changed the power which he vested in himself when he chose Corfu as his new home, something which he identifies at the end of "Cities, Plains and People":

For Prospero remains the evergreen
Cell by the margin of the sea and land,
Who many cities, plains, and people saw

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Yet by his open door
In sunlight fell asleep
One summer with the Apple in his hand. (173)

It was Reggie Smith, that "black-browed . . . rationalist"¹⁸ and husband to Olivia Manning, who nicknamed Durrell "the magician" during the Cairo years. It seems a particularly appropriate characterization for the poet during that formative wartime period, and one which he would have welcomed as high praise, unlike that agonized *Zauberer*, Thomas Mann. During those ten years of peace and war, of Greece and Egypt, that magician's role was the key to his growth as an artist, and his survival. Unburdened by the weight of particular literary traditions and orthodoxies, unfettered by any ethnocentric identity as "English" poet with a fixed sense of native culture, Durrell remained free to expand his craft, to create worlds where worlds, by force of historical circumstance, were being destroyed. His "magic" was undiminished, even with the loss of his "miracle ground"; if Egypt offered him less than the Greece he had known for five years, he scarcely acknowledged defeat. He had other tricks up his sleeve, among them the prose *Quartet*, conceived during the war, and born a little over ten years after Durrell's departure from Alexandria's muddy harbor, en route to Rhodes.

¹ G. S. Fraser, *A Stranger and Afraid: Autobiography of an Intellectual* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1983), p. 124.

² Lawrence Durrell, Introduction, *Return to Oasis: War Poems and Recollections from the Middle East 1940-46*, ed. Victor Selwyn, Erik de Mauny, Ian Fletcher, G. S. Fraser, John Waller (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1980), p. xxiii.

³ Lawrence Durrell, Introduction, *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*, by E. M. Forster (London: Michael Haag, 1982), p. xiii.

⁴ Lawrence Durrell, *Collected Poems 1931-1974*, ed. James A. Brigham (London: Faber, 1980), p. 165. All textual quotations are taken from this definitive source, cited parenthetically.

⁵ John Press was one of the first critics to establish a crucial link between the poems and the *Quartet*: "The best introduction to *The Alexandria Quartet* is to read the *Collected Poems*, just as the best gloss on his poems is contained in *The Alexandria Quartet*." See *Rule and Energy: Trends in British Poetry Since the Second World War* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), p. 204. Alan W. Friedman comments on the same relationship in *Art for Love's Sake: Lawrence Durrell and The Alexandria Quartet* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1970), p. 22.

⁶ Durrell, Introduction, *Return to Oasis*, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

⁷ Alan Friedman uses the same poem to establish his sense of the transition from Greece to Egypt. See *Art for Love's Sake*, pp. 18-19.

⁸ Lawrence Durrell, *Panic Spring* (New York: Covici and Friede, 1937), p.

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150. For even sharper expressions of contempt see Durrell's letter to *Poetry London* (April 1939), n.p.

⁹ "Lawrence Durrell: A Clever Magician," *The Poetry Review* (May-June 1947), p. 177.

¹⁰ "Introduction: An Anatomy of Exile," *Personal Landscape: An Anthology of Exile* (London: Editions Poetry, 1945), p. 14.

¹¹ "A Change of Landscape," *Personal Landscape*, 2, Part 4 (1945), p. 2.

¹² Lawrence Durrell, *The Greek Islands* (New York: Viking, 1978), p. 109.

¹³ In an important early review-essay Bernard Bergonzi identified Durrell's tendency "to make a mythology out of friendship" and his refusal to distinguish between "'real' people and imaginary personae." *Gemini*, 1, No. 1 (Spring 1957), pp. 26-27.

¹⁴ Introduction, *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*, pp. x, xi. Durrell credits Cavafy with this dual perception of the city. A recent assessment of Cavafy's influence on Durrell's poetry is by A. T. Tolley in *The Poetry of the Forties* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 40-41.

¹⁵ *Personal Landscape*, 2, Part 2 (1944), pp. 19-20.

¹⁶ *Citadel* (Oct. 1942), pp. 2-6.

¹⁷ Derek Stanford, *The Freedom of Poetry: Studies in Contemporary Verse* (London: Falcon Press, 1947), p. 132.

¹⁸ Fraser, p. 124. Smith is the unnamed "friend" acknowledged by John Waller in his appreciation of Durrell (see note 9). Waller preferred to modify "magician" by adding "clever."

“Wrinkled Deep in Time”: *The Alexandria Quartet* as Many-layered Palimpsest

BY CAROL PEIRCE

“I suppose (writes Balthazar) that if you wished somehow to incorporate all I am telling you into your own Justine manuscript now, you would find yourself with a curious sort of book—the story would be told, so to speak, in layers. . . . like some medieval palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing another.”¹

This passage, imaginatively fused with Lawrence Durrell’s own approach to the novel, begins to illuminate one significant aspect of *The Alexandria Quartet*. It is a highly complex work, rich in allusions to the past—to history, legend, and myth. Durrell not only incorporates in its atmosphere an impressionistic feeling of ancient Alexandria but also reveals the many ages of the city (of kings, of God, of man) still existing as a symbolic reality within the “historic present.”² The *Quartet*, in fact, can be seen as a “sort of palimpsest”—allusion beneath allusion, legend under legend, each revealing a possible level of meaning or effect.³ All this enriches and deepens the texture of the work, giving a sense of world enough and time—“Time immemorial” as Durrell puts it.

Durrell has, however, created more than a poetic novel of allusions. The *Quartet* is carefully designed to include many different elements of the Alexandrian, and Western, past. It is imbued with the spirit of the city founded by Alexander, ruled by Cleopatra, idealized by Plotinus. It holds deep memories of an even older Egyptian civilization, and it

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includes the city as philosophic center of Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, and the conflicting orders of early Christianity. It is, however, to Cleopatra's time, both ancient and in its Elizabethan incarnation, that Durrell returns again and again. Behind the modern, tawdry Egyptian city shines (in his own metaphor) the mirror image of the ancient city of light. The individual volumes of the *Quartet* reflect varying aspects of the older Alexandria, while also suggesting different modes and forms of literature; but each book ultimately seems to center on one aspect for its effects.

Behind the first novel, *Justine*,⁴ lies the founding of the city radiating out from the burial-place of Alexander. The plot, character, and imagery begin to reflect the story and world of Cleopatra and the Ptolemies, while introducing philosophies of the spiritual city of the first centuries A.D. The novel, too, is romantic in mode and poetic in values, verging on the tragic—not unlike Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, which Durrell draws on and parallels in both plot and character throughout the *Quartet*. It explores, in a sense, the question Cleopatra asks at the beginning of the play: "If it be love indeed, tell me how much."⁵

The dark lady of Durrell's poetic imagination, Justine, is clearly the modern reflection of the Egyptian queen. Durrell said once in an interview, "I think Cleopatra was probably something like her."⁶ Her introduction to the reader resembles that of Shakespeare's Cleopatra: "She passes below my window, smiling as if at some private satisfaction, softly fanning her cheeks with the little reed fan" (*J*, 19), just as her predecessor is recalled by Enobarbus being fanned by pretty dimpled boys (*Ant*. II. ii. 201–05). Described by the narrator, Darley, as having been seen first in the great glass mirror of the Hotel Cecil, squired by her husband:

... dressed in a sheath of silver drops, holding her magnificent fur at her back She could not help but remind me of that race of terrific queens which left behind them the ammoniac smell of their incestuous loves to hover like a cloud over the Alexandrian subconscious. (*J*, 20)

In a later reference to a similar first meeting described by her former husband, Arnauti, he adds that it was on "a night of carnival" (*J*, 70). A waft of darkness, a hint of her perfume and one senses Justine's changeable longing, also, to slip out hopping "forty paces through the public street" (*Ant*. II. ii. 229), for another gaudy night of her own.

Justine swings from the sexually passionate but never fulfilled woman to the magnificent, catlike queen with the forceful, masculine

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mind; like Cleopatra, dressing Antony in her gowns and herself donning his sword (*Ant.* II. v. 18–23), she can be seen in sex-role reversal. Durrell has established early that there is “something different, something subtly androgynous, inverted upon itself” (*J*, 14) in the very air of Alexandria, and the memory of the marvelous queen must be some part of it. Justine is described in ways that could apply equally to Cleopatra: “yet how touching, how pliantly feminine this most masculine and resourceful of women could be” (*J*, 20). And later, “yet how magically she seemed to live—a mistress so full of wit and incantation that one wondered how one had ever managed to love before and be content in the quality of the loving” (*J*, 166). Darley must, like Enobarbus, feel that:

. . . other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry,
Where most she satisfies. (*Ant.* II. ii. 236–38)

Durrell creates no single parallel to Antony in the first volume, though he suggests that Arnauti was a “minor Antony” (*J*, 97) and though her second husband, Nessim, will become an Antony later. Durrell rather uses Shakespeare’s portrayal as a running leitmotif of a brave man’s loss of the world he loved, glorious Alexandria. He takes one scene from the play (out of Plutarch, later a poem by Cavafy) and returns to it in memory at important moments throughout (*Ant.* IV. iii). Old Cohen, dying, says, “Listen to the music!” And Darley reflects, “How different from the great heart-sundering choir that Antony heard—the rich poignance of strings and voices which in the dark street welled up—Alexandria’s last bequest to those who are her exemplars” (*J*, 111–12). He himself will finally leave Alexandria to the music of such a procession. “I admit to having ‘Elizabethanized,’ ” Durrell has confessed.⁷

An even deeper layer of Alexandrian history is revealed through Nessim. As the ancient city radiated out from the tomb of Alexander, so the modern city expands from the business crossroads where Nessim is “Prince”:

Its spiritual centre was the forgotten site of the Soma where once the confused young soldier’s body lay in its borrowed Godhead; its temporal site the Brokers’ Club where like Caballi the cotton brokers sat to sip their coffee . . . (*J*, 40)

Durrell’s first description of Nessim, “drawn soundlessly down the Canopic way in the great silver Rolls with the daffodil hub-caps” (*J*, 27) to arrive at his office, “that sarcophagus of tubular steel and lighted glass” (*J*, 29), anticipates Darley’s observation: “I am thinking of the

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founders of the city, the soldier-God in his glass coffin, the youthful body lapped in silver, riding down the river towards his tomb" (J, 39).⁸

It is later, however, in his series of historical dreams—like De Quincey's *Dream Fugue*—that Nessim's relationship to Alexander is most deeply plumbed. Though never actually identified as such, these dreams are, as well as a *déjà vu* of early Alexandria, an amalgam of Alexander's first marches into Egypt toward the site of the city and of his later strange drive to Siwah to be named a god. Nessim's identification with him is completed by a deceptively small but sharp note in "Consequential Data":

(Museum)

Alexander wearing the horns of Ammon

(Nessim's madness). He identified himself
with A. because of the horns? (J, 250)

Behind Nessim's mother, Leila, exists, as well, the figure of Alexander's mother, Olympia, the "dethroned Empress, feeding her snake" (B, 78).

Durrell found counterparts for many of these memories in the poetry of Cavafy, and Cavafy himself moves within the *Quartet*, his poetry echoed and re-echoed, his theories lived out by the characters, and his personality reflected, as Jane Pinchin has suggested, in that of the homosexual Gnostic, Balthazar.⁹ Durrell, writing of Cavafy, "the secret figure who for me first symbolized the city I got to know so well," says that "they [the characters] could not have been created had I not seen them through the smoked glasses of the old poet's art."¹⁰

These many levels, then, are an important part of Durrell's volume of romance, important too to the picture of Darley, immature and dazzled by his own writing but seriously in search of his true artistic self. So always behind the neophyte narrator can be sensed, sometimes in earnest and sometimes in mockery, the voice and experience of Durrell himself. Very early Darley writes: "Our common actions in reality are simply the sackcloth covering which hides the cloth-of-gold—the meaning of the pattern" (J, 17). The search for this deeper meaning is finally the central quest of the *Quartet*.

Balthazar, "a sibling, not a sequel" (B, Note [5]), stands in comic and realistic contrast to the romance and poetry of *Justine*, just as Shaw's comic *Caesar and Cleopatra* contrasts with Shakespeare's tragic play or as the two pillars guarding the entrance to the mysteries of the Tarot are inscribed J and B, Affirmation (or Beginning) and Negation.¹¹ The two objects Balthazar leaves with Darley, in fact, epitomize these volumes. The rose thrown from the departing ship is a memory of the old Alexandria of *Justine*; the great interlinear left on the table,

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"cross-hatched, crabbed, starred with questions and answers in different-coloured inks, in typescript" (*B*, 21), is a prototype of *Balthazar*. And like the *Quartet* itself, or the ancient *Book of the Dead*,¹² it seems to Darley "to be somehow symbolic of the very reality we had shared—a palimpsest upon which each of us had left his or her individual traces, layer by layer" (*B*, 21–22).

Darley learns from the interlinear that he has been duped and sets out to find the exact truth. In doing so he posits a brilliant image from archaeology of a death mask like the one Schliemann uncovered and assumed to be Agamemnon's: "The picture I drew was a provisional one—like the picture of a lost civilisation deduced from a few fragmented vases, an inscribed tablet, an amulet, some human bones, a gold smiling death-mask" (*B*, 14). This time he will proceed scientifically, realistically, driven back to his starting point, to "set it all down in cold black and white" (*B*, 23). To pursue his point he turns first to a photograph taken of them all in Mnemjian's barber shop and sees himself ruefully, "in my shabby raincoat—the perfected image of a schoolteacher" (*B*, 24). But while Darley again follows every clue to find reality, just as in *Justine* he had followed every carrot to find love, Balthazar reflects more profoundly:

"Fact is unstable by its very nature. Narouz once said to me that he loved the desert because there 'the wind blew out one's footsteps like candle-flames'. So it seems to me does reality. How then can we hunt for the truth?" (*B*, 102)

Balthazar thus develops the point of view of the old philosopher, building on ideas first introduced in *Justine*. Like the thinkers of what E. M. Forster calls the spiritual city (Philo the Jew, Plotinus the Neo-Platonist, Valentinus the Gnostic), Balthazar inquires into the nature of truth and the nature of God; and, like them, he perceives the dual vision of the ideal and real worlds, the one gleaming like "the white mystic rose of Neo-Platonism" and the other seeming, as it seemed to the Gnostics, "the work of an inferior deity, the Demiurge."¹³ In each belief man must somehow rise beyond himself to see the vision, to find the truth. Plotinus suggests that "to any vision must be brought an eye adapted to what is to be seen," and Balthazar possesses that eye.¹⁴ He counsels Justine and her friends to strive to a higher level beyond the evil demiurge of this world, in spite of the evil which taints them and all people and so blinds them to the awareness necessary for salvation. This awareness can only be achieved by knowing where truth lies and using up the dross of the world to leave it alone shining in silence and perfection.¹⁵

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Balthazar sees Alexandria and life as dual: "you must understand that to work here at all . . . one must try to reconcile two extremes of habit and behaviour I mean extreme sensuality and intellectual asceticism" (J, 98). It is this clash that we see in Justine, who, from the Gnostic point of view, tries to exhaust lust and license by using them up herself, and, like Valentinus's Sophia, falls through too much love. As Balthazar and Justine seek the way, so does Darley. Durrell seems to see the separate quest of each philosophy as, in the end, one and the same search for the mystic vision of God and Truth—a journey from the real to the ideal.

The heritage of Renaissance Hermeticism, closely connected with Neo-Platonism through thinkers like Ficino and Giordano Bruno, pursues the same search in an attempt to reach through to an intuitive understanding of the divine and the human. Through Hermes Trismegistus it is associated, however incorrectly, with Egyptian magic.¹⁶ A thread of magic and the occult runs through the *Quartet*, and Durrell sees Bruno as its magus: "The ground plan, if I can do it, is four books of which the first two fit into each other—different but the same book—Giordano Bruno."¹⁷

Tied in to the *Quartet*, like both Gnosticism and Hermeticism, is the strange, Renaissance-medieval deck of cards, the Tarot. Durrell said in an interview following the publication of *Justine*, "I'd like to hope that seen from the other end of the continuum my characters seem not just 'people' but symbols as well like a pack of Tarot cards."¹⁸ Each card in sequence relates to a character or development in the *Quartet*; and the deck as a whole follows the story of the young initiate's striving for manhood, artistry, and the heraldic vision, aided by the Fool seeking wisdom and the Hermit philosopher seeking truth.

This occult level of the *Quartet* begins to come most vividly to life in *Balthazar*, most obviously, as Carl Bode has pointed out, in the character of Pursewarden.¹⁹ His cryptic messages on art ("The artist must catch every scrap of wind" [B, 114]) and on life ("The object of writing is to grow a personality which in the end enables man to transcend art" [B, 141]) align him with the Fool. This identity is built up in many ways, as in his statement that gods and men "intrude on each other's lives, trying to express themselves through each other" (B, 124) or in his feeling that "irresolute and shabby" in life, it is through art that "I . . . might bring resolution and harmony into the dying lives around me" (B, 239). And through being the Fool, as well as by direct association, Pursewarden becomes at times Dionysus the Greek god and Osiris the Egyptian—and, of course, finally, Durrell himself as master Joker and

novelist-god of the *Quartet*.²⁰ Pursewarden, too, though unbelieving, leads the life of a perfecting Gnostic. His function is caught in his puzzling epitaph, " 'Here lies an intruder from the East' " (B, 241), further explained by Durrell's remark in an interview that "Pursewarden's suicide is the sacrificial suicide of a true cathar."²¹ So we return to Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Neo-Platonism and the philosophic theme.

The ideal and real vision of *Balthazar* is caught unforgettably in a symbolic image from the earliest pages: "We saw, inverted in the sky, a full-scale mirage of the city, luminous and trembling, as if painted on dusty silk An hour later, the *real* city appeared, swelling from a smudge to the size of its mirage" (B, 16).

The third volume of the *Quartet*, *Mountolive*, develops in a new direction to establish objective, as contrasted to subjective, reality. Told from the point of view of an omniscient author (or possibly of Darley trying another form) and written like a nineteenth-century novel, it "is as tame and naturalistic in *form* as a Hardy; yet it is the fulcrum of the quartet and the rationale of the thing."²² But it can stand alone, too, in its own right.

The very title, *Mountolive*,²³ suggests its functioning in several ways. Behind it lie long shadows of books like *Middlemarch* (or even, ironically, *David Copperfield*). Mountolive the man builds a distinguished British diplomatic career in a beloved alien land, not unlike that of Mountbatten in India. Finally, the title suggests its Christian affiliations: the book moves directly in its Alexandrian progression into the Christian era.

Mountolive at last presents the facts—though not necessarily the truth—lying at the heart of the *Quartet*. But the materials are as overtly controlled as in a Hardy or Eliot novel. The central topic is the education of a young man to a point of success—or seeming success. It goes back in time from *Justine* and *Balthazar* to follow the slow but inevitable development of Mountolive's character toward a moment of moral choice, with his rising career projected against the falling life and religious dreams of Narouz. Irony lies, as it does in *Middlemarch*, in the ideal of aim and dream modified in action by the slow but steady toll of environment, career, and character bent. As Mountolive rises in fortune but falls in character, Narouz, caught in the vicious trap of his own deformity and violent though not unloving nature, seems to fall to destruction but actually rises to tragedy. He is not unlike Heathcliff, and the sections of the book involving him sound something of the same note as *Wuthering Heights*. Furthermore, two other men, Pursewarden and Nessim, meet the same moral choice as Mountolive—nation or cause versus the

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destruction of someone loved. As in the great nineteenth-century novel, the way each meets the challenge defines his character.

George Eliot sets the pattern in *Middlemarch*:

... there is always a good number [of middle-aged men] who once meant to shape their own deeds and alter the world a little. The story of their coming to be shapen after the average ... is hardly ever told even in their consciousness; for perhaps their ardour ... cooled as imperceptibly as the ardour of other youthful loves, till one day their earlier self walked like a ghost in its old home and made the new furniture ghastly.²⁴

Like Lydgate before him, Mountolive does "not mean to be one of those failures,"²⁵ though he will be. In the first paragraph Durrell sets him up as "a junior of exceptional promise ... fully aware of the responsibilities of future office" (*M*, 11). But he handicaps him immediately: "He had been formally educated in England, educated not to wish to feel" (*M*, 18). Though in Egypt, through Leila and Nessim, he begins to lose this old self and grow a new one—"Is this the real meaning of education?" (*M*, 22) he muses—his life pattern is against him. As he rises in the diplomatic corps, always looking forward to some great future of accomplishment, he slowly, "by expediency, compromise and hard work" (*M*, 55), learns to conform. Finally returning as Ambassador to Egypt, he is described, in the very moment of triumph, as closed within a patterned self: "His uniform encased him like a suit of chain armor" (*M*, 131). Faced with the discovery of Nessim's plot and Pursewarden's suicide, forced to choose between friendship and duty, he tries to hold steady, but cannot. The weight of the decision bears him down: "'In matters of business a diplomat has no friends,' he said stiffly, feeling that he spoke in the very accents of Pontius Pilate" (*M*, 188).

He does, indeed, speak with the very accents of Pilate; for this is his role to play in Durrell's recasting of the Christian myth. Beneath the modern Coptic plot against Egypt and England move not only Antony and Cleopatra's attempts to control the West and the East but also, and even more strongly, the yearning and striving of early religious leaders, the Palestinian hopes for a nation, the destructive role of a Pilate. Like Balthazar, Pilate asked the meaning of truth; but he would not hear the answer. Like Pilate, Mountolive, a "puffy and petulant dignitary" (*M*, 271), powerless to act, is "suddenly face to face with the meaning of love and time" (*M*, 281).

The brothers Hosnani (Hosanna in near anagram) are at the center of the plot to aid Palestine and form a new Middle Eastern order. But whereas Nessim is concerned with politics and leadership, Narouz

becomes a fanatic religious crusader. Powerful, primitive, and riveting in personality, he is from the beginning an enigma. As in *Heathcliff*, good and evil, control and license, freedom and possession are equally present. His blue eyes, for instance, are like an angel's—but in the East blue eyes are deemed demonic (*M*, 32). He is, naturalistically, linked to the Egyptian land he loves; but he is also “possessed by it” (*B*, 83). With his animals—the chicks, his horse—he is controlling but gentle; with wild animals or untrue men, he is fierce and terrible. Animal imagery is used to define him, but so is religious imagery. When Mountolive is first taken to meet him, it is “as if, despite his youth, they had intruded upon some tousled anchorite in a cliff chapel” (*M*, 26). Feeling the Coptic movement a holy war, he develops his own strange powers of religious fanaticism and preaches, as Pursewarden describes it,

through the great puffs of incense which now seemed to blow up at us from the center of the earth—the angel and demon-haunted spaces below the world of men. . . . Nobody had apparently suspected the existence of this spellbinder in their midst—the man with a whip! He could lead a great religious movement, I thought to myself. (*M*, 124–25)

Narouz has taken on the role of a Christ figure, totally enwrapped in his dream, through which he had “that first day of his possession, invoked the divine spirit to visit him with a declared truth” (*M*, 229).

Just as he is consumed by his religious role, he seems also possessed by violence, even by evil, by the power of his whip. Nessim laments the terrible change:

He shuddered. And then it slowly came upon him that in a paradoxical sort of way Narouz was right in his desire to inflame the sleeping will—for he saw the world, not so much as a political chessboard but as a pulse beating with a greater will which only the poetry of the psalms could invoke and body forth. . . . He was a prodigy of nature but his powers were to be deployed in a barren field which could never nourish them, which indeed would stifle them forever. (*M*, 230)

As the novel slowly unwinds, itself a great whip, Durrell assumes Biblical language and imagery. Narouz makes his dying stand before the sacred thorn tree²⁶ and is carried home, wrapped in a purple curtain, as in “some grotesque religious procession” (*M*, 306). “If he had been able to resort to the old-fashioned magic of the Egyptian fables, of the New Testament, he would gladly have told Narouz to rise” (*M*, 308), Nessim thinks. But Narouz is tugged down and the name on his lips at death, “Clea,” is forceful enough to haunt her and to call to her from the grave. Destined for heaven or ancient underworld, angel or demon,

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Christ or possessed saint, Narouz is left in his mystery. One is reminded of the heaven and hell of Heathcliff's soul, and one thinks of another ending: "I lingered round them, under that benign sky . . . and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers, for the sleepers in that quiet earth."²⁷ "Of what, he wondered, could Narouz be dreaming now, with the great whip coiled beneath his pillow?" (M, 318).

Finally, *Clea*,²⁸ the last volume, moves forward in time across the waste land of modern war-torn Alexandria in its quest for values to take up the encompassing theme of the growth of artist and man. Darley is again telling his story—but a Darley who has developed subtler skill as a writer. He establishes early that he has grown in his understanding as well, for he speaks of beginning to live, not just in passing hours but "between the ticks of the clock so to speak" in the "continuous present, which is the real history of that collective anecdote, the human mind" (C, 14). Durrell again uses a photograph to make his point, this time a faded snapshot of Darley and Melissa. Darley concludes, remembering a line from Cavafy ("Sometime in August—*was* it August?"): "For the life of me I could not recall the time and place; yet there it was, in black and white, as they say" (C, 40, 285). But the reader is recalled to an earlier question: "Is poetry, then, more real than observed truth?" (C, 30).

Self-reflexive in its critical and intellectual nature, *Clea* addresses the question, for itself and for the whole *Quartet*, of establishing a sort of novel that would be both modern and "classical"—for our time" (B, Note [5]). "Classical" suggests belonging to the main tradition of an age or establishing its tradition; and in that sense one might cite *The Waste Land* as a twentieth-century touchstone which sets and proves the norm of the modern.²⁹ Classicism, however, as differentiated from romance, realism, naturalism, calls for certain values, such as clarity and restraint, unity and balance, and a form larger than life itself into which life fits—as in the *Oresteia* or the *Phaedra* or, in our time, Eliot's *Four Quartets*. *Clea* meets both tests in its reaffirmation of the mythic tradition and in its repose as work of art. It attempts, as Pursewarden (and Durrell) long before suggested, "to combine, resolve and harmonize the tensions so far created. . . . in this last book [to] insist that there is hope for man, scope for man, within the boundaries of a simple law" (B, 238–39). Written in three large blocks, *Clea* incorporates, first, a movement back toward Justine's world and a closing of that door forever. It then presents in Pursewarden's notes a central critical manifesto, while leading through him to the deepest level within the *Quartet*, the myth of Osiris and Isis. Lastly, moving forward into the world of *Clea*, the "city's grey-eyed muse," it affirms the myth of rebirth. It also gathers within its

broad, calm structure some of the most modern—and even contemporary—of approaches to arrive at a triumphant exaltation of the artist's heraldic universe.

Symbolism and myth join in this novel of which the waste land journey is the central metaphor. Walking the streets of Alexandria "like the Adam of the medieval legends," "weightless now, as if after some long wasting illness," but recovered in peace of mind, Darley sees the city almost as an existentialist would—as "Alexandria, princess and whore. The royal city and the *anus mundi*" (C, 63). As quester, he must cross its desert, remeet his fatal *belle dame* and find with Camus that she is "only another woman . . . waiting for the poet to clothe her, breathe life into her" (C, 56). A defeated Cleopatra—"No more but e'en a woman" (*Ant.* IV. xv. 73)—with war and life closed in around her, Justine has "become a woman at last" (C, 62).

Rounding out the Antony and Cleopatra theme, Durrell goes more deeply into the myth of Osiris and Isis, sounding Pursewarden and Liza's mythic resonances as he earlier had sounded Justine's. In turning to the ancient Egyptian story of incest, death, and rebirth, through that "one book there, a Plutarch" (C, 190), which Pursewarden and Liza had pored over as children, he goes back to Plutarch's *Moralia* as he earlier had gone to the *Lives*. In the opening lines of *De Iside et Osiride* (not inconsequentially addressed to a Delphic priestess named Clea) he surely found a reiteration of Balthazar's question and Pilate's jest, as well as a reflection, after Darley's own heart, on the nature of life and time:

All blessings, Clea, should be sought of the gods by the intelligent . . . for nothing greater is attainable by man, and nothing nobler can be granted by God, than truth. . . . for if one took away knowledge of what really exists, and insight, immortality would be a matter not of life but merely of the passage of time.³⁰

Darley seems to speak to the same point:

If I have spoken of time it is because the writer I was becoming was learning at last to inhabit those deserted spaces which time misses Like the dead Pursewarden I hoped I might soon be truthfully able to say: "I do not write for those who have never asked themselves this question: 'at what point does real life begin?'" (C, 14)

Darley, too, in the Chapel Perilous beneath the sea confronts the Grail knight's question—no longer asking what Justine or Melissa can give him, but what he can do to help Clea. He must wound to heal—and learn with Pursewarden "the two great forgotten words, namely

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'helpmeet' which is much greater than 'lover' and 'loving-kindness' which is so much greater than 'love' or even 'passion' " (B, 128).

Some of the answers to the questions of the *Quartet* come as Darley circles back to his first values, realizing that "poetic or transcendental knowledge somehow cancels out purely relative knowledge," that a deeper value exists in the "mythopoeic reference which underlies fact" (C, 176). Pursewarden had said it already, "Brother Ass: the so-called act of living is really an act of the imagination." The artist must make the "enigmatic leap into the heraldic reality of the poetic life" to find himself (C, 153). The passage sings with lines of Homer and Shakespeare and Eliot behind it:

The heraldic reality can strike from any point, above or below: it is not particular. But without it the enigma will remain. You may travel round the world and colonize the ends of the earth with your lines and yet never hear the singing yourself. (C, 154)

On the last pages of the *Quartet*, Darley has himself become an Antony leaving Alexandria. Sirens sound in the harbor recalling his first questioning in *Justine*: "Somewhere in the heart of experience there is an order and a coherence which we might surprise if we were attentive enough, loving enough, or patient enough. Will there be time?" (J, 221). Yes, for Darley has lived the experience and come of age into art, understanding, and loving-kindness. He has listened to the music in the air.

Durrell has discovered, in fact, one answer in the very method of symbolism and layering he has used in the *Quartet*:

It took me years to evolve *Justine* because I was having to work on so many different levels at once; history, landscape (which had to be fairly *strange* to symbolize our civilization), the web of occultism, and finally the novel about the actual process of writing. What I was trying to achieve was a canvas that was both historic and ordinary; to get that I made use of every modern technique. . . . go back to the origins: *The Book of the Dead*, Plato, to the occult traditions which are still alive in the East.³¹

Durrell has, indeed, created his palimpsest well, layer over layer, some half rubbed out. And thus he can be seen as pointing both back to older values of poetry, drama, and language and forward to new dimensions of symbol and form in the "continuous present" of the novel.

¹ Lawrence Durrell, *Balthazar* (New York: Dutton, 1958), p. 183. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as B.

² Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller, *Lawrence Durrell—Henry Miller: A*

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Private Correspondence, ed. George Wickes (New York: Dutton, 1963), p. 65. In an early letter to Miller, Durrell explains the term grammatically to define a verb tense; but, as his ideas develop, it seems to illuminate much of his spacial theory, which he gradually extends into a literary parallel of Einsteinian space-time.

³ Lawrence Durrell, *The Big Supposer: Lawrence Durrell, a Dialogue with Marc Alyn*, trans. Francine Barker (New York: Grove, 1974), p. 66.

⁴ Lawrence Durrell, *Justine* (New York: Dutton, 1957). All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *J.*

⁵ William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. M. R. Ridley, The Arden Edition (1954; rpt. London: Methuen, 1974), I. i. 15. All references to the play are to this edition.

⁶ Lawrence Durrell, "Lawrence Durrell Answers a Few Questions," *Two Cities* (1959); rpt. in *The World of Lawrence Durrell*, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: Dutton, 1964), p. 158.

⁷ Lawrence Durrell, "The Kneller Tape (Hamburg)," in *The World of Lawrence Durrell*, p. 167.

⁸ This description reflects E. M. Forster's phrasing in *Alexandria: A History and a Guide* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 9: "So he descended the Nile again, wrapped in gold and enclosed in a coffin of glass, and he was buried at the center of Alexandria by her great cross roads, to be her civic hero and tutelary god." Durrell was deeply indebted to Forster in spirit. Writing to Alan Thomas from Belgrade in 1952, he asked him please to send "the fragments of my Alexandria novel," a packet that included "E. M. Forster's book on Alexandria, yellow cover, limited ed—signed by E. M. F." Lawrence Durrell, *Spirit of Place: Letters and Essays on Travel*, ed. Alan G. Thomas (New York: Dutton, 1969), pp. 114–15.

⁹ Jane Lagoudis Pinchin, *Alexandria Still: Forster, Durrell and Cavafy* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 188–89.

¹⁰ Lawrence Durrell, "Justine," *Holiday*, April 1969, p. 74.

¹¹ Bill Butler, *The Definitive Tarot* (London: Rider, 1975), p. 118. The letters stand for the Hebrew words, *Jachin* and *Boaz*, and are printed on white and black pillars in the Ryder-Waite deck.

¹² Durrell and Miller, pp. 201–02. Durrell, in fact, referred to the *Quartet* as his *Book of the Dead* in its early stages. He wrote Miller from Alexandria, Spring, 1945: "I have drafted about twenty pages of the new version of the Book of the Dead—it's about incest and Alexandria, inseparable ideas here, but will take me a year or so to do and with little hope of English publication." See also pp. 105, 245, et passim.

¹³ Forster, pp. 68, 75. The most valuable work on Gnosticism is Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958). Durrell himself, however, has written the Foreword to Jacques Lacarrière, *The Gnostics*, trans. Nina Rootes (London: Peter Owen, 1977).

¹⁴ Forster, title page.

¹⁵ One calls to mind the concluding sentence of *Justine* but also thinks of all the other silences it implies.

¹⁶ I am indebted to Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and The Hermetic Tradition* (New York: Random House, 1969).

¹⁷ Durrell and Miller, p. 314.

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¹⁸ "Lawrence Durrell Answers a Few Questions," *The World of Lawrence Durrell*, p. 157.

¹⁹ Carl Bode, "Durrell's Way to Alexandria," *College English* (1961); rpt. as "A Guide to Alexandria" in *The World of Lawrence Durrell*, p. 211.

²⁰ Richard Cavendish, *The Tarot* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 59-66.

²¹ "The Kneller Tape," *The World of Lawrence Durrell*, p. 168.

²² Durrell and Miller, p. 327.

²³ Lawrence Durrell, *Mountolive* (New York: Dutton, 1959), p. 11. All further references to this work appear in the text as *M*.

²⁴ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), p. 107.

²⁵ Eliot, p. 107.

²⁶ The *nubk* or *nabk* tree, also known as Christ's Thorn.

²⁷ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. V. S. Pritchett (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), p. 287.

²⁸ Lawrence Durrell, *Clea* (New York: Dutton, 1960). All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *C*.

²⁹ Durrell also says in this regard, "The classical in art is what marches by intention with the cosmology of the age" (*B*, 245). This is much the same definition but includes as well the suggestion of twentieth-century literature positioned by Einstein's theory of space-time.

³⁰ *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride*, ed. and trans. John Gwyn Griffiths (Cambridge: Univ. of Wales Press, 1970), p. 119.

³¹ Durrell, *The Big Supposer*, p. 62.

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Mirrors and the Heraldic Universe in Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet*

BY RAY MORRISON

The mirror sees the man as beautiful, the mirror loves the man; another mirror sees the man as frightful and hates him; and it is always the same being who produces the impressions.¹

The heart of the sage is quiet; it is a mirror (*kien*) of Heaven and Earth, a mirror (*king*) of all things.²

Near the beginning of *The Alexandria Quartet*, Darley recalls Justine sitting before the multiple mirrors at the dressmaker's being fitted for a shark-skin costume; she says: "Look! five different pictures of the same subject. Now if I wrote I would try for a multi-dimensional effect in character, a sort of prism-sightedness. Why should not people show more than one profile at a time?"³ Such statements prepare the reader to enter a world where character and truth become allotropic and function according to a relativity principle. Durrell is quite clear about these matters when he claims that "Modern literature offers us no Unities,"⁴ and he has turned to science in an attempt to complete a tetralogy whose form is based on the space-time continuum of modern physics. The first three parts (*Justine*, *Balthazar*, and *Mountolive*) are deployed spatially and are not linked in a serial form but interlap and interweave in a purely spatial relation. The fourth part (*Clea*) represents time and is a sequel. Turning the novel through subjective and objective modes, Durrell creates a four-decker work that becomes a series of "sliding panels" (338), a kind of "palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or

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perhaps supplementing another" (338). In such a context Alexandria is a city at once sacred and profane where the reader moves on many intermediate levels such as those "between Theocritus, Plotinus, and the Septuagint" (338). "To intercalate realities" (370), Balthazar tells the immature Darley, is the only way to be faithful to Time, for at every moment the possibilities are endless in their multiplicity. Life consists in the act of choice, the perpetual reservations of judgments and the perpetual choosing.

In keeping with these preoccupations, Durrell organizes most of his ambitious concerns in *The Alexandria Quartet* under one major controlling symbol—the mirror. Without counting synonyms and cognate forms, there are more than one hundred and twenty mirrors used throughout this tetralogy. In *Justine*, there are more than forty; in *Balthazar*, approximately twenty; in *Mountolive*, more than forty; and in *Clea*, approximately twenty. Backed by "the moonstone mirror of [Lake] Mareotis" (314), Alexandria becomes a laboratory of consciousness for an investigation of modern love and an interrogation of human values. Where writing itself is "a technique of therapy" (763) in what is a search for "a proper self" (370), these mirrors are important to a variety of central concerns. Of necessity this paper restricts itself to three related issues. The first of these focuses on Durrell's exploration of the crippling effects of egoism and power on the imaginative life. The second deals with the growth of an artist such as Darley, the narrator-protagonist of much of *The Alexandria Quartet*, as he comes to reflect an ironic compassion and the relativity of truth, especially in terms of epistemological positions within a space-time continuum. Finally these mirrors are so handled that they are of paramount significance in representing Durrell's Heraldic Universe, his special signature and preoccupation with a mystical unity resting behind phenomena and lives, which he delineates through a confluence of Eastern metaphysics and Western physics. In the claims of Taoism, the mirror lights up the world as it reflects the workings of nature and time. Symbolizing an awareness of these, the mirror comes to represent the illumined mind.⁵

At the opening of *Justine*, Darley tells us that he has fled to a remote sunburnt headland in the Cyclades in order to heal himself and understand his wounding experiences in Alexandria. Having reached a dead end in himself, he confesses: "I lack the will-power to do anything with my life, to better my position by hard work, to write: even to make love. . . . This is the first time I have experienced a real failure of the will to survive" (24). In this first fragmentation of his maturity, he feels

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the confines of his art and living deepened immeasurably. Lying "suspended like a hair or a feather in the cloudy mixtures of memory" (20), he begins to reconstruct Alexandria and his life there from notebooks, diaries, and materials by Justine, Nessim, Arnauti, E. M. Forster, and Cavafy. Returning link by link along the "iron chains of memory" (17), Darley so orders his life that at first it resembles sets of experiences comparing themselves like reflections in different mirrors. To represent the more limiting aspects of memory, Durrell, with considerable wit, creates Mnemjian, a hunch-backed, violet-eyed dwarf who shaves the dead in the Greek hospital and prostitutes himself to wealthy widows. This "Memory man, the archives of the city" (36), runs a glittering Babylonian barber's shop where Darley and other customers lie down in mirrors and are "swung smoothly down into the ground wrapped like dead Pharaohs" (35). Still "bandaged by dreams" (22), Darley never seems to consider that anything as rich as memory can be a cheat. In *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, Durrell claims that "the control of human memory is essential for any kind of future advance of the species." He adds that the "refining of false time is the issue"⁶ in much of his fiction.

In the first volume of the *Quartet*, Justine is among the most inveterate of mirror gazers and is often found apostrophizing her own reflections. Again consulting *Moeurs*, the novel written by Arnauti, Justine's former husband, Darley discovers that these two first encountered one another in the gilt-edged mirrors of the moribund Cecil Hotel during carnival. In Arnauti's obsessive desire to understand his disoriented wife, he even resorts to reading the blotting paper from her letters in mirrors. Life for her, Justine reveals, is an "Unhealed Place" (64), which she tries to keep "full of people, accidents, diseases, anything that comes to hand" (64). She admits that this is an apology for wiser living and recognizes that she must "work *through* the dross" (65) in her own character, burning it up. Raped as a child and distraught at the disappearance of her small daughter, Justine finds her neurasthenia is merely heightened by Arnauti's desire to explain her life comfortably through an easy psychology or philosophy. Soon their relationship founders. After her marriage to Nessim and her active role in his political conspiracy, Darley enters "her mirror-life" (63). Appropriately when she first speaks to him, he stares up boorishly to find her leaning down at him from "the mirrors on three sides of the room" (32). Flattered by the attention of Justine and her wealthy Coptic husband, this bespectacled schoolteacher with chalk on his sleeve falls under her spell and remains dazzled by the self she proffers.

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Thinking back along the chain of kisses Justine had forged, Darley, on his island, moves "steadily back into memory, hand over fist, like a mariner going down an anchor-chain into the darkest depths of some great stagnant harbour . . ." (159). Despite the fact that he recognizes there is a death of the self in every repetition of the word *Alexandria*, he remains an egoist. As an artist, Darley draws solace from Nessim's words that those Justine harmed most she made fruitful, for she "expelled people from their old selves" (33). Admitting quite fondly that she is his tyrant and "not really human" (164) as "nobody wholly dedicated to the ego is" (164), Darley begins to spin fictions soothing to his mind and heart. Now the mirror sees the man as beautiful and loves him. Soon Justine assumes the dimensions of a Cleopatra, and in his acts of ego-aggrandizement this poor clerk of the conscience transforms himself into a minor Antony. At an imaginative level, Darley nonetheless remains aware that somewhere in the heart of experience there are "an order and a coherence which [he] might surprise if [he] were attentive enough, loving enough, or patient enough" (178). To his question "Will there be time?" the reader remains skeptical. Without a sense of the irony and the relativity of events governing a life, Darley has "safely locked up on paper, confided to the strong room of memory" (209) his past according to patterns at odds with *Alexandria* herself.

After Balthazar has read Darley's book, he returns his manuscript with an Interlinear, including a list of fallacies and misapprehensions, the most startling being that Justine had not loved Darley but had merely used him as a decoy and, if she loved anyone, it was Pursewarden. With the shattering of his fanciful ordering of reality, Darley finds, in Balthazar's "acid-bath of words" (681), that emotions can be painfully retroactive. Now the mirror sees the man as loathsome and ridicules him. Seeing that his "culprit mind" (194) has created "sophistries of paper logic" (300), he accepts the destruction of his private *Alexandria* as necessary, if he is to develop as "a poet of the historic consciousness" (95). As "memory . . . catches sight of itself in a mirror" (209), he comes to accept with chagrin that we live lives "based upon selected fictions" (210). Our view of reality is conditioned by our position in space and time, "not by our personalities as we like to think" (210). With the wicked Interlinear, freighted with doubts, pressing like a blunt thumb always in bruised places, he reluctantly embraces the idea that "Truth is what most contradicts itself in time" (216). Recognizing that "we live in the shallows of one another's personalities and cannot really see into the depths beneath" (305), Darley, the timid scholarly

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lover, realizes, with "life-giving detachment" (160), that Justine had surrendered to him "only one of the many selves she possessed and inhabited" (297). Now he meditates on the inscription written on Pursewarden's mirror: "I do not cease to reflect upon art and upon every form of temptation which obscures the spirit" (293). Only through this further refining of memory with its hurts and hugged imaginings can Darley advance as an artist.

While Darley, Balthazar, and Clea work at how "to harness time in the cultivation of a style of heart" (383), others such as Justine, Nessim and Mountolive become increasingly caught up in the ego and the will in their pursuit of power. Soon love, the "truest form of right attention" (306) in the search for a proper self in this novel, becomes twisted into a "Faustian compact" (554) where minds burn up as if dipped in quicklime. Caught up in plots and counter-plots, characters like Nessim and Mountolive become prey to gravitational forces in "the time-spring" (565) of their own acts. When "the paradigms of power unleashed" (565) fulfil themselves, individuals find themselves "bricked up by the historical process" (566) where lives become but "a mirror-reference to reality" (554). Deeply at odds with their buried selves, these characters suffer frightening Groddeckian ailments. When Pursewarden discovers the political conspiracy, he leaves his message written on the hotel-room mirror for Nessim just as if it had surfaced there out of the exigencies of the historical process itself. Now the plot ramifies like a stain: Narouz is swept to his death; Nessim and Justine fall into the net of the corrupt Memlik Pasha; and Pursewarden commits suicide. (We are told he has stepped into the quicksilver of a mirror as we all do at death.) Amidst the isolation and remorse, characters in the naturalistic *Mountolive* volume find that their misfortunes bear their own fingerprints and words themselves become the mirrors of discontents.

Unlike those individuals so deeply at odds with the spiritual concerns of Alexandria, Darley and others see man as "an extension of the spirit of place" (143). Balthazar, "the Platonic *daimon*" of the city and "the mediator between its Gods and its men" (78), comments most tellingly on the quest in this "unconsciously poetical mother-city" (234); he speaks of

the *fons signatus* of the psyche and of its ability to perceive an inherent order in the universe which underlay the apparent formlessness. . . . and could enable people to penetrate behind the veil of reality and to discover harmonies in space and time which corresponded to the inner structures of their own psyches. . . . 'None of the great religions has done more than exclude,

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throw out a long line of prohibitions. But prohibitions create the desire they are intended to cure. We of this Cabal say: *indulge but refine*. We are enlisting everything in order to make man's wholeness match the wholeness of the universe—even pleasure, the destructive granulation of the mind in pleasure.' (85)

When we recall the comment about the coherence at the heart of reality, which the artist can surprise if he is attentive and loving enough, we feel Darley to be speaking about these harmonies of space and time corresponding to the structures of the psyche. At this point Darley has become so blinkered as he travels backwards and forwards "along the tramlines of empirical fact" (813) in his own life that he can only give lip service to such an idea. He has still to learn that reason at best is a fogged mirror badly in need of cleaning.⁷

Often those characters with metaphysical concerns speak somewhat casually of tides and time-rhythms at work deep in their lives and worlds. Even though Balthazar expresses his ideas on the structure of the psyche and wholeness in mystical terms, Durrell anchors most of his ideas carefully in the ground of Samuel Alexander's revolutionary work, *Space, Time and Deity*. In Durrell's words, Alexander "suggests that the space-time material is the primordial reality out of which things have evolved."⁸ Especially significant for *The Alexandria Quartet* is Alexander's view of a *nisus* or impulse carrying Space-Time⁹ forward into materiality, life, and "deity." In the past, the custom was to regard spatial and temporal concepts as creations of the human mind. Alexander reverses all these ideas and asserts that mind is a latecomer in the universe and is just a function of Space-Time in its slow evolution towards "deity."¹⁰ In "The Basis of Realism," Alexander tells us that his philosophic concern is

to de-anthropomorphize: to order man and mind to their proper place among the world of things; on the one hand to divest physical things of the colouring they have received from the vanity and arrogance of mind; and on the other to assign them along with minds their due measure of self-existence . . . Realism strips mind of its pretensions but not of its value or greatness. . . .¹¹

Through the narrative structure with its mirrored surfaces, Darley comes to reflect such a view of mind after he has burned through the dross of self, those limitations of vision and temperament arising from egoism and what he calls "that lying self-deception so natural to sentimentalists" (681) such as he. For him a "Copernican" revolution has occurred. Where "Truth is a matter of direct apprehension" (306) reason is now relegated to the position of a trusted figure in the

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commerce between logic and illumination. Eventually Darley sees that he has been digging about, blind as a mole, in the graveyard of relative fact, piling up more and more data, yet completely missing the mythopoeic reference, the meaning of the space-time pattern.

In an interview Durrell claims that Lao-tzu and Einstein are now "within hailing distance"¹² and ponders sadly why we find it so difficult to bridge the two, especially since he sees us so in need of such a mutually enriching exchange. In certain ways *The Alexandria Quartet* represents such a fusion of these seemingly opposed worlds. For Durrell, Europe has always been "a civilization based on the principle of the Will."¹³ The result for the West has been a bloody history of prohibition, possession and power, culminating in an arid detour among material amenities finally leading us back to "the Taoist formula after centuries of illness."¹⁴ As a result, Lao-tzu's ideas on the relativity of all values, wise passivity and compassion, represent a corrective to the egoism that often makes man so stupid, cruel, and self-destructive. Appropriately Mnemjian, the memory man, dressed in a dazzling silver outfit and walking with an air of grotesque perturbation, as if balancing on corkscrews, comes to Darley's island to summon him back. When Darley enters the Alexandrian harbor just before dawn, the city is in the grip of an aerial bombardment during World War II. The ultimate manifestation of the rampant ego and will to power in our civilization, Hitler and his "vulgar blood-soaked reality" (732) engulf this city of the human estate in a whirlwind of meaningless power.

Nessim and Justine, trapped by their own conspiracies, Darley soon finds, have done themselves considerable damage as they have tried to force time as the weak do. Nessim has lost an eye and Justine has suffered a small stroke leaving her left eyelid drooping, her face slightly leering. In contrast, Darley no longer wears glasses to correct his myopia nor is he stoop-shouldered. Testing his new self-possession in terms of his loves and his past, he exhibits an ironic compassion and a good-humored generosity offensive to Justine. Face to face with the mirror of time, he accepts that it is not he who reworks reality. Rather it is "reality which works and reworks us on its slow wheel" (657). These hard-won advances have been purchased through his refining of memory and an honest ordering of experience in the *Balthazar* volume where words burned like surgical spirit in the open wound of his egoism and cleansed as all truth does. In Taoist terms, he has been polishing "the dark mirror"¹⁵ of the mind.

Stripped of its pretensions and de-anthropomorphized as Alexander advocated, Darley's mind becomes the still surface of a mirror in

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which the Heraldic Universe, this mystical unity suggested through a confluence of Western science and Eastern metaphysics, manifests itself in moments of vision. To delineate Heraldic Reality, Durrell selects certain metaphors from Taoism that he links with space-time since both the Tao for Lao-tzu and Space-Time for Alexander¹⁶ are the primordial realities out of which all matter and life arise. Probably the most important concentration of material serving this bridging of East and West occurs in Pursewarden's "Notebook." Addressed to Darley and entitled "My Conversations with Brother Ass," these remarks become a handbook of sorts on the nature of literature in terms of "the heraldic aspect of reality" (759). Essential to his growth as a modern artist, this journal serves as a mirror in which he sees himself reflected as a "moon-calf" (749) writer working in a three-dimensional province busily putting "a tea-cosy over reality" (758). Sometimes with laughter and occasionally smarting from the blistering candor, Darley is quite surprised to find he is now so little wounded in his self-esteem by Pursewarden's remarks.

In an obvious statement that mirrors the structure of the *Quartet* itself, Pursewarden prods Darley toward the contemporary, if not the original, in fiction when he tells him that if he wishes to do more than just demonstrate his skill with words he might try a four-card trick in the form of a novel by passing an axis through four stories and dedicating each to the four winds of heaven. The curvature of space would give stereoscopic narrative while human personality seen across a continuum would become prismatic. If such a form were satisfied, the problems of causality and indeterminacy for the self would assume new significance and Darley would not find himself like most of his contemporaries drowsily plodding along the dotted line of narration. Balthazar tells Darley that once when Justine had scolded Pursewarden for wasting his time reading science, he spoke of the impact of the relativity proposition on modern arts. Pursewarden had added: "In the Space and Time marriage we have the greatest Boy meets Girl story of the age. To our great-grandchildren this will be as poetical a union as the ancient Greek marriage of Cupid and Psyche seems to us" (306). Pursewarden later reminds Darley that it is not enough to toss concepts from modern science idly into works. True art can only occur at the point where "a form is sincerely honoured by an awakened spirit" (751). For Pursewarden a good writer should be able to write anything, but "a great writer is the servant of compulsions which are ordained by the very structure of the psyche and cannot be disregarded" (758). Such compulsions, we now perceive, are ordained by the space-time flow

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from which the psyche arises. Through the polishing of the mirror of self by shedding the whole complex of egoisms, the mind is stilled and the writer surrenders himself to a pulse beating within the *nisus* or "will" of space-time itself as it attempts to carry us forward to "deity," the next level of emergent consciousness in Samuel Alexander's philosophy.

About such acts of quietude and surrender, the Taoist explains: "In tranquillity, in stillness, in the unconditioned, in inaction, we find the levels of the universe, the very constitution of Tao."¹⁷ Often we hear of the sage advising us to tend the mind so that we can return once more to an original state as close to the Tao as possible. To know the universal rule of the Tao is to be illumined; not to be aware of it is "to fret in vain and bring down misfortune on oneself."¹⁸ In his *Heraldic Universe* Durrell reflects the ultimate mystery, the beauty, and peace of the Tao, the Mother of All Things, before which our language often falls silent. For Pursewarden the fundamental aim of art is to evoke this "ultimate healing silence" (763). The symbolism contained in such a work is only a frame of reference, he tells Darley, through which, "as in a mirror, one may glimpse the idea of a universe at rest, a universe in love with itself. Then like a babe in arms [the artist will be able to] 'milk the universe at every breath!'" (763). Not to be confused in any way with narcissistic love, this vision of repose mirrors a universe in love with its own wholeness, its reconciliation and transcendence of antinomies, whose benevolence for the writer becomes the cloth-of-gold suffusing quotidian reality. Enigmatic and haunting in its beauty, this vision of love as the integrating power at the heart of Heraldic Reality lends further credence to Durrell's claim that the *Quartet* is an investigation of modern love.

When Pursewarden writes of "the prolongation of childhood into art" (764) wherein he sees pictured "an original innocence" (762), he mirrors the idea from Lao-tzu that the newborn child is nearest the Tao and that truly great men reflect such an infant heart. Since there is nothing inherently evil about the Tao, Pursewarden denounces Original Sin as "that filthy obscenity of the West" (762). In the context of these Eastern and Western ideas, God's real and subtle nature is clear of all distinctions, like "a glass of spring-water" (117), tasteless, odorless, merely refreshing. Again the writer's job, as Pursewarden keeps stressing, is somehow to unite the rushing, heedless stream of humanity to this tranquil plenum from which "its own motive essence is derived" (772). Those who make the enigmatic leap into this heraldic dimension find that truth has "its own built-in morality" (772). Such a world holds out the promise of a unique happiness which only some of Durrell's

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characters seem well-enough equipped to grasp. Those like Justine clinging tenaciously to the ego find themselves trapped, staring into "mirrors made of quartz, dead stars" (566).

In his love for Clea, Darley comes ever closer to this happiness that the world offers. Walking about the streets of Alexandria in the spring sunlight, he now feels like the Adam of the medieval legends, "the world-compounded body of a man whose flesh was soil, whose bones were stones, whose blood water, whose hair was grass, whose eyesight sunlight, whose breath was wind, and whose thoughts were clouds" (700). Reflecting the *fons signatus* of which Balthazar spoke, Darley seems, in his consonance with nature, to have become "spiritualized earth."¹⁹ Weightless, as if after some long wasting illness, he finds himself turned adrift to float upon the shallows of Lake Mareotis with its old tide-marks of appetites and desires now refunded into the history of place. Accepting his love for Clea "like a clear draught of spring water" (734), he senses that his past and present have joined at last without any divisions and that all his memories and impressions have ordered themselves into one complex pattern whose metaphor is always this "shining city of the disinherited—a city now trying softly to spread the sticky prismatic wings of a new-born dragonfly on the night" (723). Finally he begins to sense how mysteriously the configurations of his own life have taken their shape from "the properties of those elements which lie outside the relative life—in the kingdom which Pursewarden calls the 'heraldic universe' " (792). In its wise passivity, Darley's mind becomes a luminant as he attunes himself to the space-time flow in his cultivation of a style of heart.

The configurations shaping Darley's life become much less mysterious when Durrell's claim that "Only the city is real," which appears in the "Note" at the beginning of the *Quartet*, is taken seriously. Again, in the first page of the novel, Darley tells us that his beloved Alexandria has used him and his friends as her flora and precipitated in them conflicts which were hers but which they mistook for their own. A few pages later, he elaborates again on the role of this city: "We are the children of our landscape; it dictates behaviour and even thought in the measure to which we are responsive to it" (39–40). Again we are told that this "city, half-imagined (yet wholly real), begins and ends in us, roots lodged in our memory" (209). From an imaginative point of view, Durrell informs us, Alexandria is "the hinge of our whole Christian culture, historically bridging Eleusis and Rome."²⁰ Here the imaginative links running through India and Chaldea to Heraclitus and Plato were snapped forever. It is in this context that Durrell talks of trying to forge

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a link once again between East and West, between Lao-tzu's and Einstein's worlds, with their many similarities. As "the unconsciously poetical mother-city" (234), Alexandria becomes a laboratory of this new consciousness, the site of an intercalation of the Tao, the Mother of All Things, and the Space-Time primordium. Having refined the "false time" of personal memory, Darley surrenders himself to the rhythms and properties arising from this *fons signatus* and accepts Alexandria, with its old, dark powers, forever sited in the human wish, as "that invisible author" (828) of his new-found freedom. Like a magnet passed under a sheet of paper containing iron filings in the commonplace experiment one does at school, Alexandria, the embodiment of those ideas from the East represented by Lao-tzu and those from the West represented by Einstein, has been shaping the temporal events of Darley's life, arranging them into configurations approximating the health of the universe itself. Where art has been the purifying factor and endurance the real teacher, Darley's mind-as-mirror now reflects the spiritual order at the heart of Heraldic Reality.

At last Darley enters the Alexandria of the human estate, where the buoyancy of his new disposition possesses him like a draught from what the Cabal calls "The Fountain of All Existing Things" (730). He senses that his future lies open before him and must be left "to form itself upon the emptiness of the present" (842). Surrendering himself to the tidelines of his own life, he seems to be approaching that stage where the artist can play "like a fountain without contention, without even trying" (762), so that art finds its true expression. Just as Pursewarden has pointed out, sexual and creative energy now go hand in hand. Much like the yin and yang of the East, these energies convert into "the solar sexual and the lunar spiritual holding [their] eternal dialogue" (762). Riding the *nisus* of space-time these rhythms embrace the whole of the human motive arising from their plenum. Of course, Durrell does more than just theorize about these forces in the lives of the inhabitants of this city rising against "the flat mirror of the green lake" (216). At its most generalized the placements of the dervishes in the text and their ecstatic dancing draw our attention to a heraldic dimension beyond our circumscribed situation. Whirling, these "tops spun by God" (866) penetrate the veil of reality and dance out the measures of the hidden spiritual world. In Narouz, Nessim's painfully shy, hare-lipped brother, we see an awakening to the spiral of space-time mirrored in more personal terms. When he addresses the Coptic community for the first time, he is crippled with terror. Hoarsely he calls out for divine assistance. Gradually, as if an electric current pours into him, the

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banausic shell of ego is pierced. The "poetic consciousness which lay, coiled like a spring" (579) in the human heart, awakes in all its beauty. Like "a pulse beating within a greater will" (578-79), the charged poetry of its outpouring sends his listeners sprawling. When the current shuts itself off, Narouz flees, weeping, in his deliverance.

For the gentle Darley his actual admission to the Heraldic Universe comes as a result of a test requiring violent action. When Clea and Balthazar are swimming with him and Clea's hand is pinned to an underwater wreck by the spear from Narouz's harpoon gun, Darley must act swiftly to save the drowning woman he loves by severing her hand. Despite his introspective passivity he discovers that the "man of action and the man of reflection are really the same man, operating on two different fields" (796). This is quite in accord with Taoism wherein passivity and action become mutual elements in what appear to be opposing areas on the same spectrum. Out of quietude, we are told, at the precise time, the right action can emerge without volition.²¹ Appropriately Darley later describes his action in a similar way. Suddenly rowelled by the sharp spur of terror, he finds himself, as he puts it, volitionlessly confronting, in the mirror of his being, "an alter ego shaped after a man of action" (849) he has never realized before. This "unknown alter ego whose voice comes from far away" (851) draws on an order of emotions he does not associate with his scholarly self. In what Durrell calls "a mime about rebirth on the parable plane,"²² Darley resuscitates Clea by pumping air into her lungs "slowly but with great violence" in a "pitiful simulacrum of the sexual act" (851). Centering on "breath" in its metaphysical significance, Darley's "love-act" becomes life-saving, life-giving. Sex and knowing assume a primal importance here, especially in achieving "artishood" in terms of the open secrets of Heraldic Reality which Pursewarden was trying to pass on to Darley.

Durrell sees the psyche as bisexual and has defined man as an Eros-breath, a being Eros-powered, Eros-dowered.²³ No doubt this definition arises from his vision of a universe in love with its own smiling plenitude where the artist, like a babe, in the presence of the Mother of All Things, is sustained by its motive force. In such a context, breath becomes an awareness of the Tao and breathing an assimilation of its spiritual power. This appears to be what happens with Darley and Clea as they come of age as artists. After Darley surfaces from the clear water of the harbor with Clea, he explains: "Yet we hit the sky with a concussion that knocked the breath from me—as if I had cracked my skull on the ceiling of the universe" (850). This blow seems to have opened him to the power beating within the "will," the *nisus* of the

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space-time flow itself. As a result, the breath knocked out of him appears to expel the remnants of Brother Ass, his old social self with its reticence and shame. The same holds true for Clea: as the new breath is forced into her, she at last seems freed from her painful anxieties and frightening dreams.

For Lao-tzu there could be "no true Holiness without a proper revitalization of femininity."²⁴ It appears, as Darley resuscitates Clea, that he calls into life his own feminine dimensions, the yin of self, so necessary for the artist who is to write about Heraldic Reality. In her assumption of the new hand, that delicate and beautiful steel contrivance in its green velvet glove, Clea suggests she has incorporated within herself the hardness and glittering nature often associated with the masculine, the yang of self, and already softened it. Trembling, she writes to Darley of her new hand, saying: "IT can *paint*!" After her "interior metamorphosis," she claims that this metallic extension of self has contrived to let her slip "through the barriers into the company of the Real Ones" (874), those artists of whom Pursewarden spoke. As well, Darley finds he has made the enigmatic leap into the Heraldic Universe as an artist and is able to step across the threshold into the kingdom of the imagination and take possession of it once and for all. At the end of *The Alexandria Quartet*, we find Darley also with trembling fingers writing those four words, "Once upon a time . . ." He concludes: "And I felt as if the whole universe had given me a nudge!" (877). At last he has become one with time in the cultivation of a style of heart that reflects a co-operation with the flow of the universe itself. As a poet of the historic consciousness of the Tao and Space-Time, Darley's progression as an artist, in some mysterious way, seems to resume the whole development of the universe itself while his own creative art fecundates the world anew. His mind is now a mirror of heaven and earth, a mirror of all things.

From his first novel, *Pied Piper of Lovers*, published in 1935, Durrell has been concerned with what he has come to call his Heraldic Universe. By the time of the writing of *The Alexandria Quartet*, this vision has grounded itself in those primordial entities, the Tao and Space-Time, with their veiled workings. To suggest these mystical dimensions before which our language so often falls short, Durrell draws on the word "heraldic," with its charged associations from heraldry, to present a surface on which an emblazoned figure or design appears, representing the workings of these powers sited in the human wish. Mentioned only once but resonating at many points in the novel as a symbol of Heraldic Reality, the cloth-of-gold, the meaning of the

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space-time flow, floods up into phenomena and lives, suffusing the world with a coherence and beauty, as it does at rare moments of illumination for Darley and others. Pervasive in its placements and functions in the text, the mirror acts as a mediating surface between quotidian reality and those time-rhythms in their heraldic aspects, conveying a consonance between man as microcosm and the world as macrocosm. Polished, the mirror of self reveals, in its depth, a universe in repose, colored by charity and love. Such a visionary landscape-out-of-time has the capability of striking the right chord in the human heart by its appeal to clemency, truth, and the spiritual order of life.²⁵ In opposition to the blood-stained realities, the dread, and the nausea of modern life, Durrell's Heraldic Universe calls out to win over the will in man and produce that inner order he enigmatically calls love-in-time.²⁶

In terms of an old Chinese observation, *The Tao of Physics* claims that mystics have always understood the roots of the Tao but not its branches, whereas scientists have viewed it in an opposite light.²⁷ Despite Einstein's famous statement that religion without science is blind and science without religion is lame, many traditional thinkers in our world still warn that science should have no trafficking with mysticism while others caution mystics that they are never very well served by the research of scientists. According to those authors who do write about the rapprochement of modern physics and traditional mysticism, what our world needs desperately as a corrective is not so much a synthesis of the two as a dynamic interplay that can liberate some of our crippled thinking. And this is what Durrell has given us in his intercalation of the Tao and Space-Time.²⁸ With its heraldic airs, Alexandria serves as a mandala-mirror in which is reflected such an enriching interplay with its "brush-strokes of thoughts" (657), besieging meaning and clamoring for identity in the lives of so many of these characters. Where comedy is often viewed as a preparation for life through the education of the heart, Darley and Clea turn at the end of the tetralogy towards "the old inheritance" (872) of Europe once again. With a touch of the sage and even the saint about them, this couple returns "home" as carriers of the heraldic vision to infect with health, in whatever ways they can, their exhausted, will-plagued society. What Durrell presents us with in *The Alexandria Quartet* are glimpses of his Heraldic Universe that draw our attention away from our own blinding and destructive pursuits. His evocative and poignant resonances plant themselves in the speculative mind like notes of music belonging to some larger composition. While we may never hear the complete music, Durrell is persuasive in convincing us it does exist.

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¹ Lawrence Durrell's first epigraph to the *Balthazar* volume of *The Alexandria Quartet* derives from D. A. F. de Sade's *Justine*.

² Quoted from Bernhard Karlgren in his "Early Chinese Mirror Inscriptions," in *The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* (Östaasiatiska Samlingarna) Bulletin No. 6 (Stockholm, 1934), p. 12.

³ Lawrence Durrell, *The Alexandria Quartet* (London: Faber, 1968), p. 28. All further references to this work appear parenthetically.

⁴ Lawrence Durrell's "Note" to the *Balthazar* volume (London: Faber, 1958). This helpful statement is absent from the one-volume edition of *The Alexandria Quartet*.

⁵ Max Kaltenmark, *Lao Tzu and Taoism*, trans. by Roger Greaves (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 64.

⁶ Lawrence Durrell, *The Revolt of Aphrodite* (London: Faber, 1974), p. 20.

⁷ Lawrence Durrell, *Reflections on a Marine Venus* (London: Faber, 1953), p. 169.

⁸ Lawrence Durrell, *A Key to Modern British Poetry* (Norman: The Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1952), p. 32.

⁹ I follow Samuel Alexander here; he explains: "I use for convenience capital letters for Space and Time when I am speaking of them in general or in wholes. Small letters are used for any portion of them (thus a space means a portion of Space); or an adjectival phrase like 'in space' or 'of time.' The practice is not without its disadvantages . . ." (*Space, Time and Deity* [New York: Dover Publications, 1966], I, 35). For Durrell, moreover, we must often read Time and time as Space-Time and space-time respectively.

¹⁰ Of necessity Alexander's simplest explanation of "deity" must suffice here. He defines this crucial term as "the next higher empirical quality to mind, which the universe is engaged in bringing to birth" (*Space, Time and Deity*, II, 347).

¹¹ Samuel Alexander, "The Basis of Realism," *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1913-1914), pp. 279-80.

¹² Lawrence Durrell, "The Kneller Tape (Hamburg)," in *The World of Lawrence Durrell*, ed. Harry T. Moore (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1962), p. 167.

¹³ Lawrence Durrell, "From a Writer's Journal," *The Windmill*, 11 (1974), p. 54.

¹⁴ Durrell, "From a Writer's Journal," p. 54.

¹⁵ Chang Chung-yuan, *Tao: A New Way of Thinking* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 32.

¹⁶ Durrell never goes so far as to equate the work of Einstein and Alexander, but he does, at some points, seem to imply that certain of their ideas are interchangeable. Whatever the case, he does draw implicitly on Alexander's philosophy to clothe the basic analogies drawn from Einstein that shape the structure of *The Alexandria Quartet*.

¹⁷ J. C. Cooper, *Taoism: The Way of the Mystic* (The Denington Estate, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press, 1972), p. 77.

¹⁸ Kaltenmark, p. 44.

¹⁹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Religion: East and West* (Vol. XI of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*), trans. by R. F. C. Hull (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1958), pp. 73-74.

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²⁰ Durrell, "The Kneller Tape," p. 168.

²¹ Cooper, p. 77. This quotation is attributed to Lin Yutang in *The Importance of Living*.

²² Durrell, "The Kneller Tape," p. 166.

²³ Durrell, "The Kneller Tape," p. 162.

²⁴ Kaltenmark, p. 60.

²⁵ Durrell, *Reflections on a Marine Venus*, p. 121.

²⁶ Durrell, *From a Writer's Journal*, p. 54.

²⁷ Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (Berkeley: Shambala, 1975), pp. 306-07.

²⁸ In addition to Capra, four or five of the more interesting works appearing within the last eight years that throw light on what Durrell had been working on for fifteen years in the *Quartet* are Gary Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics* (London: Ryder/Hutchinson, 1979); Michael Talbot's *Mysticism and the New Physics* (New York: Bantam, 1981); Amaury de Riencourt's *The Eye of Shiva: Eastern Mysticism and Science* (New York: William Morrow, 1981); Heinz R. Pagels' *The Cosmic Code: Quantum Physics as the Language of Nature* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982); and Paul Davies' *God and the New Physics* (London: J. M. Dent, 1983).

Lawrence Durrell and the Modes of Modernism

BY REED WAY DASENBROCK

The subject of this essay is Lawrence Durrell's shifting reputation as a writer. Known only to a coterie audience before the publication of *Justine* in 1957, Durrell became famous with the publication of the successive volumes of *The Alexandria Quartet*. In the 1960s, Durrell was that rare specimen: a serious but popular novelist. The *Quartet* was widely read and widely praised both among the general public and among critics. And as critical studies began to proliferate on the heels of wide sales, Durrell seemed destined for a secure place in the literary pantheon. Twenty years later, that seems an altogether chancier proposition. Durrell has his advocates, and he has continued to be productive, publishing among other projects seven novels in the last twenty years (*Tunc* [1968], *Nunquam* [1970], and *The Avignon Quintet* [1974–1985]). But to use Frank Kermode's informal test of canonicity, no one who is not a member of the Lawrence Durrell Society would be embarrassed to admit that he hadn't read *The Avignon Quintet*, whereas in the 1960s when I was growing up in a small town in Ohio, even our family doctor had read *The Alexandria Quartet* and was deeply engrossed by it. Durrell's reputation has drastically declined over the past fifteen or twenty years, at least in the English-speaking world, and, though this decline is not something others working on Durrell have directly faced, it needs critical examination.

Why has there been this dramatic change? One simple common-sense explanation would be that the later works simply aren't as good as the earlier. That won't do, I'm afraid, for interestingly enough, Durrell's fall in reputation in the anglophone world has been contemporaneous with a comparable rise in France, where Durrell lives

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and writes. And though French perceptions of anglophone culture are often dismissed as bizarre by those who remember the French invention of Edgar Allan Poe, we should also remember that the French discovered the importance of Faulkner long before we did. So the question needs rephrasing. If according to Romantic notions of the artist, every artist needs to create the taste by which he is enjoyed, what went wrong in the reception of Durrell's work by the English-speaking world? By what taste was he enjoyed and then no longer enjoyed?

The turning point in Durrell's reputation came with the publication of *Tunc* and *Nunquam*, widely anticipated as the successors to *The Alexandria Quartet* but not at all well received. And that reception initiated the downward turn in Durrell's critical fortunes. It is therefore to *Tunc* and *Nunquam*, or more precisely to the difference between them and the *Quartet*, that we must turn to understand this phenomenon. What I will try to show here is that the *Quartet* was so popular largely because it worked comfortably within modes of modernist fiction writing already assimilated by mainstream taste, modes largely created by D. H. Lawrence, Proust, and Joyce. *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, Durrell's collective title for the two later novels, represents a revolt against those modes and a searching critique of them. Durrell's fall from popular (and academic) grace was caused, thus, not necessarily by a decline in the quality of his work but by a decline in its acceptability. I would argue that *The Revolt of Aphrodite* is Durrell's most interesting and successful work of fiction. It may not yet have won the audience it deserves, but that simply is the task of the critic: to identify—if not to create—the taste by which it is to be enjoyed.

It should be easy enough to see how the themes and structure of *The Alexandria Quartet* betray the influence of major modernist writers such as Proust, Joyce, and Lawrence. The principal narrator of three of the four volumes is the Irish schoolmaster and aspiring writer, Darley, and though Darley is older than Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or Paul Morel in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, his role is similar to theirs and to that of Marcel in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. He is not exactly the author, just as Stephen is not exactly James Joyce. But both his privileged consciousness and his self-identification as a writer invite the autobiographical inference or identification, and a major theme of the *Quartet* is his emerging vocation as a writer. Across the course of the novels, he undergoes the experience necessary to make him mature enough to write something like the *Quartet*. At the end of *Balthazar*, Clea writes to Darley that he is coming into his own self-possession as a writer;¹ on the very last page of the *Quartet*, he sets

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down "words which presage simply the old story of an artist coming of age."² So *The Alexandria Quartet* works within an important convention of modernism in having a figure for the artist as the central figure, but also in registering a difference in consciousness between that figure and the more mature artist creating the work. If he is "coming of age" throughout the *Quartet*, then he was obviously not "of age" as a writer at the start. The presence of the writer is therefore curiously doubled: he is both a character inside the work and the artificer outside the work creating it, paring his fingernails as Stephen Dedalus would have it. In the *Quartet*, this sense of authorial presence is further refracted or complicated by the presence of Pursewarden, the older successful novelist who seems to serve as a stand-in for all the modernist writers,³ and by the quotations from Arnauti's *Moeurs*, another novel about Justine written by an earlier writer (her first husband) seeking to understand her. The work (seemingly, the world) is full of writers seeking to come to terms with Justine and with Alexandria. And the "Interlinear," Balthazar's commentary on Darley's first volume, *Justine*, that becomes the inspiration for the second, *Balthazar*, is of course in keeping with this theme. Balthazar himself compares the way *Justine* and his "Interlinear" work together to a "medieval palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing another. Industrious monks scraping away an elegy to make room for a verse of Holy Writ!" (*B*, 183).

All of this may begin to sound fashionably deconstructive, and indeed I don't know why deconstructive critics haven't paid attention to *The Alexandria Quartet*, given its central concern with writing and inscription. But there is a crucial difference between the two emphases on writing, for in Durrell's modernist mode, writing is valued both as a mode of self-development and growth and as a mode of representing the world. And just as the artist is curiously doubled in this tradition, so too is the world the artist confronts. Experience is not neatly organized for the protagonists of these novels; the groups of dots separating sections of the *Quartet* (just as they do in *A Portrait*) serve to indicate the lack of continuity in Darley's experience. It is unorganized chaos, a chaos that the writer must experience and confront for himself. And in this thematic presentation of the modern world as chaos, as fragments, Durrell is clearly working within the tradition of modernist fiction and poetry. But if the artist *inside* the work must experience chaos, the artist *outside* the work must organize it, as one of the reasons why art is so highly privileged is that it is seen as providing order for the chaos of

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modern society, in the words of Eliot's review of *Ulysses*, "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."⁴ The modernist "portrait of the artist" distinguishes itself from its nineteenth-century predecessors by overlaying a complicated structure on top of the linear narrative of the experience of the artist-protagonist, and it does so both to order the chaos, and more importantly, to show that it is art (and art alone) that can order the chaos of modern life. So in *The Alexandria Quartet*, we have the younger Darley experiencing the chaos and fragmentation of his life in Alexandria, the maturer Darley in exile organizing that chaos in his art, and the actual author further organizing that chaos both through Darley and through the other authorial voices and devices, including the third novel, *Mountolive*, written from an entirely different perspective. The chaos of Alexandria is represented in art but it is also ordered by art, by the complex structure of the work of art.

The structure of *The Alexandria Quartet* has of course been widely studied and acclaimed, but my point here is simply that in structuring his work in this complex way, Durrell is fitting into a clear modernist tradition. Moreover, the complex structure of the *Quartet* is thematically in perfect keeping with the theme of artistic development, as we see the mature artist having mastered his chaotic material through these complex structures. And like Joyce and Proust (and, for that matter, Eliot in *The Waste Land*), the chaos Durrell structures is a city. This is equally appropriate thematically, since a city is both a zone of chaos and a formal structure within which that chaos is restrained, and these writers' fascination with the city is one measure of their distance from a Wordsworthian ideal of artistic maturation in the country. (D. H. Lawrence here, as usual, is positioned in between, striving to maintain romantic ideals in a modernist world.) The modern world is chaos and is presented as chaos, yet the artist can order the chaos through the complex structures of his art.

He also does so through memory, not through imagination: "Alexandria, the capital of memory!" (C, 11) we are told, and all three of Darley's novels in the *Quartet* begin with his invocations to memory. Nothing is more quintessentially modernist than this: for Joyce, memory was much more important for the artist than imagination, and Proust's pages and volumes on memory need little citation here. Memory—not imagination—is crucial in modernism because art needs to stick to "the here, the now," as Stephen tells himself in *Ulysses*. Art must provide order, but an order for our chaos, not an order in a

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vacuum or in an ivory tower. It must take the actual fragments of our existence and put them in an order, instead of fleeing that chaos and creating a world in and of itself. So we don't have Kubla Khan's pleasure dome or Axel's castle, but gritty, dirty, war-torn Alexandria. But out of the grit, out of the iron filings to use Ezra Pound's figure, a rose is created. And Durrell is no more quintessentially modernist than in his choice of squalid Alexandria to work his magic on. Dear Dirty Dublin and Alexandria alike, Davy Byrne's and Pastroudi's, are roses of steel dust, chaos ordered through art's structures and through memory.

So one major theme in the *Quartet* is art and its power to order life, art's control over life. But a second major theme, equally prominent and equally modernist, is life's (and art's) escape from other social forms of control. Art shapes or forms life, but it also liberates life from other socially imposed shapes or forms. Specifically, it challenges bourgeois morality and the repressions—chiefly sexual—that help constitute that morality. From *Madame Bovary* through *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* to *Lolita*, the modernist novel sharply challenged bourgeois norms and was banned and prosecuted for so doing. The resulting confrontation between art and morals was one factor in the cult of art and of the artist already discussed; it has also been a factor in changing standards of public morality, as the court cases involving the various masterpieces of modernism have been landmarks in the generally relaxing standards over the past century. Whether this has been an altogether good thing, either for art or for the public, is a question too large to answer here, but certainly art has been in this sense an important force liberating us from certain kinds of social control.

Modernist art has done this chiefly by representing those aspects of human life that earlier had not been considered proper to represent. *Ulysses* contains one of the first explicit defecations in modern fiction, and Joyce's intent there was clearly not to excite or disgust but simply to record the whole. It was of course the representation of sex and the language actually used about sex that constituted the fiercest battleground, and again the simple motive of realism explains many of these depictions, at least in Flaubert and Joyce. But in other works of modernist fiction, sex takes on thematic importance, as representing precisely that breakthrough into freedom beyond bourgeois conventions and morality. Here D. H. Lawrence and his line of descent through Henry Miller are considerably more important than Flaubert, Joyce, and Proust, the more formalist moderns, but we need to remember that this distinction is easier to make now than when these writers were writing. For all of them—in representing human sexuality

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so much more fully than their predecessors—were known (whether reviled or praised) for writing “dirty books.” It is hard to see *Ulysses* in that context today, but unless we make an effort to recover that sense, we lose a crucial part of Joyce’s meaning for his contemporaries and for the next generation of writers, including Lawrence Durrell. For a time, to write a serious book meant to write a “dirty book,” and of course Durrell’s first serious book, *The Black Book*, was another such “dirty book,” published in Paris in 1938 and not published in the U.S. until 1960, Britain until 1973.

This tradition of taking sex seriously as a mode of transcending bourgeois norms is obviously a shaping influence on *The Alexandria Quartet* as well. The novelist Pursewarden is said to have been a friend of Lawrence’s and to have written him a postcard referring to Lawrence’s “habit of building a Taj Mahal around anything as simple as a good f__k” (B, 114). But though Durrell’s compromise with convention is greater than Lawrence’s, as the dashes in his spelling here neatly register, what is *The Alexandria Quartet* but an analogous Taj Mahal? Elsewhere, Pursewarden sounds utterly Lawrencian when he writes, “we might rediscover in sex the key to a metaphysical search which is our *raison d’être* here below!” (C, 139). Or again, “For culture means sex The sexual and the creative energy go hand in hand” (C, 141). Alexandria may be the capital of memory, but it is also the capital of sex, a sexuality incarnated for Darley in Justine. In the criticism and, I am sure, for most readers as well, the sexuality bulks larger in the *Quartet* than the theme of art and the artist discussed so far: Justine is surely a more arresting character than Darley.⁵

Linked to this are the numerous citations from Freud and the general invocation of psychoanalysis. It is important in this respect that it is less the Alexandrians themselves or even Darley who refer to Freud than Durrell himself, in his epigraphs, workpoints, etc. It is not part of the material as much as the frame, and Durrell frames Alexandria with Freud in a way that links his work to this larger tradition. The sex is there not to amuse or to excite, but in the belief that through sexuality one discovers one’s own individuality beyond social conventions and norms. As Wyndham Lewis observed long before in *Tarr*—albeit critically—sex is for the average man and woman what art is for the artist—the way to transcend the norm and find fulfillment. Darley as artist finds his subject in Justine; as man, he discovers himself.

The preceding admittedly rapid survey should show how *The Alexandria Quartet* fits fairly comfortably within themes and artistic traditions established by some of the masters of modernist literature.

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What I have sketched is not the whole story about the *Quartet*; neither is it the whole story about modernism. Joyce, in particular, has been read as far more skeptical about the transforming powers of art and human sexuality than I have presented him here. But the more skeptical reading of Joyce is the later reading of the two, one that began to be developed in the years Durrell was writing the *Quartet*;⁶ and what I have sketched here is the view of Joyce generally accepted before that time, the Joyce who as part of a larger tradition of modern fiction influenced the work of Lawrence Durrell.

This tradition, to summarize, is a tradition of art about art, in which art is taken seriously as a way to transcend quotidian reality. This transcendence takes two forms: the first is through structure, by forming the ordinary, and the second is through sex, by breaking with that ordinary. And certainly much of the enthusiasm for *The Alexandria Quartet* upon its publication stemmed from the fact that Durrell manages to work with and carry forward the same themes as the modernist masters. A taste that sees this tradition as the great tradition of our own century is going to welcome the *Quartet*, particularly in the context of English literature in the late 1950s. Few other writers in this period were comparably working within the modernist tradition, and Durrell's work stands out as a refreshing contrast to the dreary and parochial reaction against modernism dominating English verse and fiction in these years. Here Durrell's exotic origins, biography, and settings for his work also place him in the cosmopolitan modernist tradition rather than anything narrowly or provincially English.

Some such account as this is necessary, I think, to place the rush of enthusiasm for the *Quartet* properly. It did not have to create a taste by which it was to be enjoyed. Instead, because it rather completely satisfied the taste of readers raised on the moderns, it was able, in Wordsworth's phrase, to "gratify certain known habits of association." Less difficult to read than Joyce or Proust and less of a challenge to standards of taste than Lawrence, it nonetheless worked within canons and assumptions created by these writers.

Durrell's next novels do no such thing. They not only fail to conform to these modernist modes within which *The Alexandria Quartet* can be placed; they deliberately confront, mock, and subvert them. *The Revolt of Aphrodite* is thematically, stylistically, and formally a deliberate and searching interrogation of the values advanced by the *Quartet*. In the process, Durrell creates a work of fiction that, to my mind, is considerably more interesting than the *Quartet*. But in so radically disrupting the tacit compliance with accepted taste that had been

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behind the great success of the *Quartet*, Durrell also lost much of his audience, both popular and academic. (He even lost his American publisher.) And tracing this remarkable *volte-face* is, I think, the best route to an understanding of Durrell's fascinating later work.

The very first scene of *Tunc* serves well to show how *The Revolt of Aphrodite* questions the modes and assumptions within which Durrell's earlier work had so comfortably worked. Felix Charlock, an inventor, the protagonist, and the narrator, is having lunch with two friends, a publisher and a psychoanalyst. The conversation revolves around Abel, a computer Felix has invented, and Abel's ability to know and predict human behavior. The example Felix slyly cites is that Abel knows that Nash, the psychoanalyst, was so excited by the confessions of a female patient that he made love to her on the spot. (This is not actually true, for Felix had the story directly from the patient, but that is perhaps less significant than the fact that Nash believes Abel to have such powers.) Nash's excitement is explicitly compared to that of a priest lewdly excited by similar revelations in the confessional, and the anecdote in mocking church and psychoanalysis alike presents psychoanalysis as a bogus church, offering titillation in place of enlightenment, control in place of liberation. This extremely funny scene—in mocking the gods of contemporary life—concisely introduces the central theme of *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, control.

Felix is an inventor who works for Merlin, a rather mysterious multinational corporation that seems to control everything. In addition to controlling the market for virtually every known commodity, it controls the lives of those who work for it. The firm, as it is customarily called, is compared by the staff to the Church and even to God: "The firm giveth, the firm taketh away." Working for the firm is a lifelong contract: one simply does not—cannot—stop. Increasingly troubled by this despite—or perhaps because of—the generosity of and the comfort provided by the firm, Felix finds that he cannot even give one of his inventions to the public. He is bound by Merlin to give the firm all his work and even if he were to give his share of the profits away, he might simply be giving the money to a charity controlled by Merlin. For indeed few aspects of contemporary life have escaped Merlin's grasp.

Tunc is essentially about Felix's attempt to do just that, to escape Merlin's control. His inspiration in this attempt is Caradoc, a gifted architect who disappears, apparently dead from a plane crash. Felix, however, suspects that he has made good his escape, and Felix fakes his own death close to the end of *Tunc* with the same aim of escape. For these men, successful escape requires a kind of death—first, a staged

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death, and second, an end to all possibility of working in their chosen métier. But such a death seems preferable to the living death of working for the firm, which in a Faustian compact seems to allow utmost freedom yet extracts its price.

Tunc in this account is hardly a tale of easy moral uplift, yet it is far more positive in its outlook than *Nunquam*. Escaping from the firm, as Caradoc says, was a matter of then or never, "*aut Tunc aut Nunquam*,"⁷ and *Tunc* represents the hopeful, rebellious moment of escape. Neither escape succeeds, however, as both Caradoc and Felix are found out, found and brought back into the firm in *Nunquam*. Caradoc had the habit of writing what he called "mnemons," little outrageous personals that he would place in the classified section of the newspapers. He can't stop the habit after his disappearance, so inevitably the firm learns that he is still alive and goes after him. More depressing yet, both Felix and Caradoc want to come back—Caradoc because the possibility of fulfilling work exists only within the firm; Felix because Julian, the elusive head of Merlin, tempts him back with a project Felix cannot resist. *Aut tunc aut nunquam*—it was then or never, but never wins, and it seems in *Nunquam* that no one left alive wishes to be free.

This point is driven home by the fate of the project Felix returns to Merlin to be part of. As a young man in Athens, Felix had a lover named Iolanthe who later (while Felix meets, falls in love with, and marries Benedicta, Merlin's principal owner) becomes a world-famous film star. Julian, obsessed with Iolanthe, had tried to possess her while she was alive, but she managed to stave off his control of her films and, impotent, he was incapable of possessing her sexually. After her death, Julian has had the idea of building a model of her as close to being human as possible, and this is the project Felix is working on throughout *Nunquam*.

Iolanthe the dummy turns out to be more independent than any of the living. She is a perfect imitation of a human being, and she alone in *Nunquam* makes a break for freedom, though her success isn't any greater than Felix's in *Tunc*. Caught by Julian and Felix in St. Paul's, she falls with Julian, causing his death. This fall makes her go electrically "live," so Felix has to stab her to "death" to avoid her electrocuting others.⁸ So if in *Tunc* residual impulses for freedom remain, by the end of *Nunquam* all human beings are completely ready to become robots. Only this robot fights for her freedom. Iolanthe, the modern figure of Aphrodite, is the only figure of opposition, and her opposition indeed represents the revolt of Aphrodite.

Her construction epitomizes the second major theme of *The Revolt of*

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Aphrodite, imitation. Art is probably as central a theme in *Revolt* as it is in *The Alexandria Quartet*, but here we have no solitary writers or painters, toiling in the privacy of their studios. Instead, we have the film industry, which mechanically reproduces Iolanthe and broadcasts her image everywhere for profit. This imprisons her, as Felix points out: "She lived by the terms of this mock art, lived a travesty of a life passed in public; as much a prisoner of her image as any of us to the firm."⁹ Art for Iolanthe does not mean freedom or self-realization; it means imprisonment and control. She can't even go out on the street without being mobbed by her fans. When she wants to meet Felix in Paris, she has to imitate someone else to be free. And she shows her real gifts as an actress by imitating a prostitute Felix had told her about all those years ago in Athens. So Iolanthe the film star—because her imitation, screen self has been so widely merchandized—can gain freedom only by imitating someone else. And here her situation is analogous both to Felix's, who—as he observes—is the firm's prisoner in a golden cage and must imitate Caradoc to be free, and to that of "Iolanthe" in *Nunquam*, an imitation who seems as real as the original.

Virtually every other aspect of *Tunc* and *Nunquam* connects back to this theme of imitation. Felix is an inventor, and all of his inventions—not just "Iolanthe"—have to do with imitation and mechanical reproduction—aids to hearing, tape recorders, transcribing devices, and finally Abel, the computer described in the first scene. The creative memory Darley draws on while writing on his Greek island has been replaced by the mechanical memory of Felix's devices. And Merlin—run by the impotent Julian—is everywhere supporting mechanical reproduction instead of natural procreation. When these two come into conflict, mechanical reproduction wins: Felix's machine Abel kills his and Benedicta's only child, Mark; Iolanthe dies as a result of complications after surgery designed to preserve her beauty, the image of a woman killing the real woman. Plans to launch an Adam, a male equivalent to "Iolanthe," are cancelled when Adam kills the man he is being based on in the laboratory. Mechanical imitations are everywhere usurping the place of the real. Thus, the theme of imitation is really one with the theme of control: in the vision of *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, we are losing our freedom precisely because we are being controlled and manipulated by imitations and mechanical reproductions. We have made our machines and been conquered by them, or—more precisely—by those who deploy them.

Now this thematic landscape obviously puts us in a different world from that of *The Alexandria Quartet*, revealing that earlier world to be

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rather quaint in its pre-technological themes and emphases. But the world of these novels is not simply different from that of the *Quartet*; it is also a comment on that earlier world. The broader social, technological, and political canvas on which Durrell is working in *The Revolt of Aphrodite* frames the earlier work and reveals its limited focus as naive. The *Quartet* is full of artists but in its world there are no publishers, agents, editors, or even readers; production is all that is depicted, not the packaging, distribution, and use of art. In *Revolt*, we see just the opposite. Through Felix's close friend Vibart, a writer who abandons writing to become a publisher, we are given a sardonic portrait of the publishing industry: Vibart is funded by Merlin and his business decisions are largely determined by Merlin's needs. In *Nunquam*, Felix's old friend Koepgen thinks he has finally broken free from Merlin, and one sign of this is that his book of poems has been accepted by a publisher. But the publisher is Vibart's firm, so Koepgen hasn't escaped at all, though Felix—unwilling to shatter his illusion of freedom—doesn't tell him this. That is the pessimistic portrait of the situation of all artists painted by *The Revolt of Aphrodite*: thinking of art as a mode of escape from social constraints, the artist is himself deeply constrained, for art is a commodity bought and sold in the world and controlled by the marketing specialists, not by the solitary artist on his Greek island. It is, of course, the fate of Iolanthe that brings this home most clearly, but the presence of Koepgen and Vibart ensure that we don't dismiss Iolanthe's fate as one peculiar to the cinema. Iolanthe represents the dilemma of all modern art: to be successful is to be controlled. And this sharply reacts against the optimistic vision of art as a mode of transcendence central to modernism and to *The Alexandria Quartet*.

That transcendence is depicted within the work of art, we should remember, both by the portrait of the young artist—Stephen, Darley—emerging from the chrysalis and by the work of art through its formal structures. But the corrosive skepticism of *The Revolt of Aphrodite* extends to structures as well: the world stands in no need of the structures of art; it is already prestructured by Merlin, thoroughly and excessively organized for Merlin's gain and advantage. The world is not chaos waiting to be organized by art; the role of art should not be to articulate but to counter the organization and structure of the world, to revolt against it.

But art doesn't revolt; Aphrodite does. And certainly one thematic continuity throughout Durrell's work is his interest in eros. But eros has been as transformed in *Tunc* and *Nunquam* as art, transformed in the same direction. There is a lot of sex in *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, but little

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love and almost no procreation. Iolanthe had been a prostitute before she became an actress, and there is no sharp distinction drawn between these roles, for both sell sex, or more precisely, a simulacrum of love. This is all the castrated Julian can buy, and he becomes obsessed with the image of Iolanthe, first by watching her films incessantly and then by constructing her double. The double is given sex organs and could have sex; indeed, one of the ideas about what to do with her is to make a fleet of Iolantes and employ them as prostitutes. So all the stages in Iolanthe's career—prostitute, film actress, dummy—are linked, are aspects of each other. Julian of course protests against the idea of the dummy Iolanthe being used as a prostitute—that would be too profane a use for his sacred symbol. But *Tunc* and *Nunquam* irreverently oppose any such sanctification of sex. All that is left of the religious impulse in the world of these novels is a religion of sex, and the "priests of love" are our psychiatrists, those who have taken sex so seriously. But the reverential attitude taken towards Freud and psychoanalysis in the *Quartet* has disappeared. Not only are the psychiatrists unworthy priests, as the anecdote about Nash that opens *Tunc* reveals, they are ineffectual, for they utterly and completely fail to help Benedicta, Felix's wife. Even worse, they are utterly complicit with the system; Merlin has a large insane asylum of its own where anyone causing Merlin trouble can be safely incarcerated, Soviet-style. So love has been as thoroughly commodified and contained as art, and neither seems capable of opposing Merlin and the forces of control.

The title *The Revolt of Aphrodite* seems deeply ironic, for by the end of the two novels, Aphrodite's revolt has been thoroughly quashed and Merlin's power seems complete. Yet Aphrodite in her revolt has killed the impotent Julian, master schemer of Merlin. Felix is now in control of Merlin, and it is an interestingly open question what Felix will do with that power. This is a choice Darley never has, for Durrell's earlier conceptualization of art was as something other than and different from society and power. But the vision of *The Revolt of Aphrodite* is that art is part of society and is deeply complicit in our social arrangements. It is no good running off to a Greek island to write; the island will probably be owned by whomever you are running away from.

Now it would take a very different essay from this to trace the influences behind Durrell's shift in perspective between *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Revolt of Aphrodite*. Durrell's critique of modern society bears some surprising resemblances—despite Durrell's generally conservative (and Conservative) political beliefs—to contemporary Marxist thinking. Probably a more direct influence is the work of Wyndham

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Lewis, who dissented from the modernist orthodoxy in ways that anticipate and have influenced Durrell's work. Lewis has never been as well-regarded—either by academics or by the general public—as the other major modernists, and the reason is surely the same reason that *The Revolt of Aphrodite* is less well regarded than *The Alexandria Quartet*. *The Alexandria Quartet* satisfies us; *The Revolt of Aphrodite* disturbs us. It is a fierce if funny, savage if entertaining attack on our complacencies. Durrell is neither the first nor the last artist to leave most of his audience behind him in his growth as an artist. But if we can see that the change between *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Revolt of Aphrodite* is indeed growth, we will at least have begun to understand Durrell's most intriguing, most powerful, and ultimately most satisfying work of art, *The Revolt of Aphrodite*.

¹ Lawrence Durrell, *Balthazar* (New York: Dutton, 1958), p. 236. All subsequent citations will be parenthetical: (*B*, 236).

² Lawrence Durrell, *Clea* (New York: Dutton, 1960), p. 282. All subsequent citations will be parenthetical: (*C*, 282).

³ The model for Pursewarden—if there is one—is an enigma Durrell deliberately teases us with. E. M. Forster has been proposed, as the major anglophone novelist to have come to Alexandria, but that is the only respect in which Pursewarden resembles Forster. He sounds a good deal more like Lawrence and is said to have known Lawrence. But he is closer to Wyndham Lewis than to anyone else in his opinions—both political and aesthetic. More telling yet, both Lewis and Pursewarden have the first name of Percy, which Pursewarden—like Lewis—dislikes and does not use.

⁴ T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth" (1923), rpt. in *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Robert H. Deming (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), I, 270.

⁵ One index of this is the subtitle of Alan Warren Friedman's study, *Lawrence Durrell and The Alexandria Quartet: Art for Love's Sake* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1970).

⁶ I am referring here primarily to what became known as the "Stephen-hating" school of Joyce criticism, best represented by Hugh Kenner's *Dublin's Joyce* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1956).

⁷ Lawrence Durrell, *Nunquam* (New York: Dutton, 1970), p. 71. All subsequent citations will be parenthetical: (*N*, 71).

⁸ I have treated the theme of death in *Nunquam* more fully in "Death and the Counterlife of Heresy in Wyndham Lewis and Lawrence Durrell," *Proceedings of the First National Lawrence Durrell Conference*, ed. Michael Cartwright, as a Special Issue of *Deus Loci*, 5, No. 1 ([Bakersfield: California State College], Fall 1981 [i.e., 1982]), pp. 306–27.

⁹ Lawrence Durrell, *Tunc* (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 266. All subsequent citations will be parenthetical: (*T*, 266).

Setting and Character in *The Revolt of Aphrodite*

BY GREGORY DICKSON

Near the beginning of Lawrence Durrell's *Nunquam*, the second novel in *The Revolt of Aphrodite*, Benedicta Merlin feels it necessary to tell Felix Charlock why Merlin's children, Julian specifically, were not "normal": "It was not only Julian's life which was aberrant," she says clearly, trying to get it all off her chest, "it was the place, too."¹ She is voicing not only a truth which applies to her and to her family, but a truth which the reader has come to recognize by this stage of the two-novel set—that the characters are, to a great degree, products of place. There is also a symbiosis extant in this relationship: not only do the characters consciously adjust their thoughts and behavior to conform to local "emanations" (as the character Caradoc would have it), but their association or identification with a particular place influences others' reactions to them. This concept is neither new nor surprising to anyone who has read even one (any one) of Durrell's novels, but it is important in *The Revolt of Aphrodite* because the main characters are cognizant of the associations and intelligent enough to recognize that this information is modifying their behavior. Through this self-reflexive characterization Durrell establishes, for the reader, a geometric—rather than arithmetic—progression of the effects of place on character.²

Early in the two-novel set, Durrell delineates the bifurcation of Merlin's firm, and it is evident to the reader that England and Turkey are the poles of this world. Turkey, seen from a holistic and simplistic perspective, represents the feeling, sensual side of the firm and the characters in the novels, while England represents the rational, mechanical side of both. Of course Durrell exhibits his experience and erudition by demonstrating that nothing is reducible to black and white,

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so we find there are grey areas—divisions within these larger categories—in both places, just as there are gray areas in the characters' "souls." And just as Durrell creates grey areas in the places themselves, he creates grey areas—Greece and Switzerland—which are stops between the two poles, both geographically and psychologically.

Significantly, in a pair of novels where association with place is so important, there are no characters associated with Switzerland. As we see later each character, with the possible exceptions of Charlock and Julian, has a place to which he or she is tied in the minds of the narrator and the other characters and even within the individual character's self-vision. But Switzerland is merely a place, neither anyone's home nor a setting with which a character is identified. Charlock can do some creative scientific work there, but when he makes love, or even thinks about love in this mountainous European land, he conjures up the same act in a different country.

But Switzerland is not a place in the novels where nothing happens: Charlock is brought back to life there after his attempted escape from the firm, Benedicta begins her confessions to Charlock and her escape from the firm there, and there Julian meets Charlock for the first time to discuss the nature of the firm and its government. But once finished with these tasks, however important, the characters pack up and leave. Perhaps it is the blandness, the lack of personality of the place that makes it valuable for these kinds of introspection: as Charlock says, "it would be hard to imagine anywhere more salubrious (guidebook prose!) to spend a long quiet convalescence—here by this melancholy lake which mirrors mostly nothingness because the sky is so low and as toneless as tired fur" (N, 18). When he tries his hand at art (science is, clearly, the only "art" he is good at) and arrives at "a perfectly brilliant idea for a new sort of jump circuit," his equation becomes a "poem to the blue evening, the sliding white mountains, . . . the trees, the world, to Benedicta herself" (N, 113). A poem to Switzerland, albeit one in the form of a precise mathematical equation, is not the same as an identification with the place, and we see later that a poem to Benedicta in the Paulhaus is not something a mature Charlock—a man who has not only pondered but understood the relationship of place and character—would consider.

Greece, the other "grey" area, is quite a different place, and much more important in *Revolt*, though it is not, again, one of the poles on the Merlin globe. Durrell does not make this place black or white either; Athens can be a city of noble structures with noble people trying to save them (Hippolyta and the Parthenon) and Hippo's villa is, at one time, a

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beautiful place full of happy people. It can also be a treacherous city—Graphos lies to Hippo about both his affair with Iolanthe and his attempt to sell rights to the Parthenon to the Merlin firm. Charlock believes that he goes to Athens just before his attempted escape “because [he] had a sudden desire to come back to the point from which all the lines sprang out.”³

He calls these pages “autobiographical notes” and they are, but it is the autobiography of an incomplete person, not only in age but in psychological understanding of his relationships with the characters, the places, and the firm that are yet to be revealed in *Nunquam*. When the robotic Iolanthe begins to speak, her voice recalls to him an Athens past, not an Athens future, and not surprisingly the recollection takes the form of an association with a person and place at the same time: “On the one hand it was all so remote, Athens, the Nube and all that. But I suddenly felt the wild pang of the Acropolis at dawn with that warm scented little body lying tangled in mine . . .” (*N*, 130).

The warm scented little body is the real Iolanthe, of course, and she, more than any other character in *Revolt*, represents Athens and Greece. When Charlock meets her she is a prostitute there and soon becomes his lover, but even though this is a “crepuscular and unsavory” city (Iolanthe/ Io even murders her brother there) it is turned beautiful to Charlock’s eyes through a love affair, even though neither of the principals uses the word “love,” and it remains beautiful to Charlock whenever he considers the time the two of them spent in the Greek capital. When he later says that Benedicta owns Istanbul “as Io owns Athens” he means as Io owns Athens in his consciousness, from his own perspective. To reiterate, this is Charlock speaking to us from his naive period, for later he might think that Io “owns” Cannes or Hollywood. But even in his maturity in *Nunquam*, Charlock associates Io with Athens. The reader knows by this time that Charlock is not inventing these associations, for the characters recognize the “souls” of different cities and change their behavior accordingly. When Charlock sees Count Banubula in Greece, for example, he notes that “The poor count made no allusion to his Turkish excesses, and nor did I. He had resumed his Athenian persona” (*T*, 193). Tellingly, after Charlock has become engaged to Benedicta, he returns to Athens and realizes that he has missed Iolanthe instead of Benedicta: “Some obscure law of association must be at work,” he thinks; “I had not given her [Iolanthe] a thought in Istanbul, she was not appropriate to the place” (*T*, 185). Pondering her new career which has forced her to leave the Mediterranean, he states: “Iolanthe now is an unidentified wave to

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sadness which reaches out for me whenever I see a slip of blue Greek sky, or a beautiful late evening breaking over the Plaka" (T, 310). She has not suddenly come to represent the place to Charlock, but she continues to represent it whenever he is in Greece, whenever he thinks of Athens, or whenever he thinks of her.

The main difference in the treatment of the stopping points, Switzerland and Greece, between the Merlin poles, is that the characters, for the most part, like and have good memories of Athens and Greece, but not of the northern land. Benedicta might not be appropriate to the place, but Charlock and others feel quite at home there, even if the feelings have negative connotations: "I suppose that Athens will always be for me what Polis must be for Benedicta—a place as much cherished for the sufferings it inflicted on one as for the joys" (N, 224).

But of all the scenes and places in the *Revolt* which influence characters and the flow of the novels, none is more influential than Istanbul. From a strictly geographical standpoint—as we remove ourselves from the role of readers of novels and become readers of maps—Istanbul is impossible to classify, and this is both apparent and influential to the characters in the novels. The city links Europe on the north with the Middle East on the south, the Mediterranean on the west with the Black Sea on the east. Many are the times when characters remark that when crossing from one side of the city to the other they feel as if they were crossing from the occident to the orient. Here, as in the other locations, Durrell makes the distinction between the city and the country, between metropolitan Istanbul and the land surrounding it: the former is Benedicta's, the latter Jocas'. Like Vibart in the passage quoted above, Charlock sees the firm and Jocas in a similar light, remarking on "the long lifelines of the firm which channeled all the riches of the Orient into the huge granaries over which Jocas presided" (T, 176). Benedicta makes the association too, and Charlock recognizes the fact; he states that "Her inner life lay with Julian, her outer with Jocas; one represented the city . . . the other the open air, the riding to falcons, the chase" (N, 35). When Charlock and Benedicta learn that Jocas is dying, the mere mention of his name returns the images of the east to Charlock: "Jocas *existed now* like a sort of colored illustration, an illuminated capital, say, in some yellow old Arabic text; yet he was after all in Merlin terms all of Africa, all of the Mediterranean" (N, 202, my emphasis). With Jocas' demise comes the demise of his country home, and the reader is not surprised. When the now-married couple visit the dying man, they "take in the dirty deal tables, the flagged floor covered

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in droppings of bats and birds, the smashed windows" (N, 250). Caradoc, the Merlin architect, has the final word on the country Jocas lives in. When he is assigned the duty of building a tomb for Jocas he remarks: " 'Just sit here and listen to Turkey, listen to what it says . . . It's a heavy death-propelled wavelength . . . That is the call sign of this gloomy old land' " (N, 260).⁴

But if the Turkish countryside is Jocas', then Istanbul itself belongs to Benedicta. This city, like London, is not all beauty, but neither is Benedicta. Charlock both sees and recalls the unpleasant side of the city when unpleasantness occurs in his life. Before his first meeting with the firm, for example, when Charlock is not certain of his direction or the intentions of the Merlin organization, he sees Polis as "deliquescent" and in "the lax and faded coloring of a dream turning to nightmare" (T, 110-11). "A heavy melancholy, a heavy depression seemed to hang over these beautiful empty monuments. Turkey takes time to know. Truth to tell, I was rather anxious to leave it and get back to the noisy but freer air of Athens" (T, 120). He would get to know Turkey, though, just as he would get to know Benedicta; he learns quickly of the relationship Benedicta has with Istanbul, soon acknowledging the connection he has established in his mind between the city and the woman, because Istanbul "had become a sort of extension of her childhood and its memories . . ." He concludes: "Well then, as I say, her city began to borrow some of *her* colors . . ." (T, 178-79, my emphasis).

When he makes a bath for her in England, not only does the water relax Benedicta (the expected reaction), but it puts Charlock in mind of her bathing in Turkey. And when, on the honeymoon trip, Charlock finds Benedicta particularly calm and sexually receptive, he muses: "We were sliding back toward Polis, that was why perhaps . . . Did she suit her lovemaking to the country she found herself in?" (T, 219). This might be true for Benedicta, but for Charlock it becomes a given. Thinking of his past and present, he states: "What a long road stretched between these two points in time and space" (N, 33).

There are, naturally, as many sad moments in literature as there are in life, but one of the saddest occurs when Julian propositions Benedicta one more time to prostitute herself for the firm. One of the bribes Julian offers is a trip to Istanbul, and he knows that not only does he identify her with the city and recognize her longing for an attachment to such a place, but that she makes the same connection: Benedicta needs Istanbul; Benedicta "owns" Istanbul. It is an irresistible proposition.

England is one of the poles of the Merlin empire, but it does not

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represent the expected north in a north-south geographical division; rather it represents the west in a Spenglerian east-west cultural and ideological division.⁵ In *Revolt* Durrell has divided England into three distinct sections: London, the laboratory at Toybrook, and the country homes. He leaves very little space at the first two of these for the characters to develop through introspection which could lead to psychological growth. They personify the calculated, mechanistic side of the firm, the characters, and the modern world. It is in London that Charlock thinks of his parents in Victoria Station, where he makes "an attempt perhaps to reidentify them among the flux and reflux of pallid faces which seethe eternally about this mnemotopic spot. Here one can eat a dampish Wimpy and excogitate on the nature of birth. *Well, nothing much comes of this thought, these moments of despairing inquiry*" (T, 27, my emphasis). Nothing much comes of any thought any of the characters might have, in either London or Toybrook, on anything connected with a revealing personal insight: London, although Charlock was raised there, does not play a large role in *Tunc*. When Charlock thinks of the firm, his job, his wife, he dreams only of the mystery and romance of the east, of "furs and skins and poppy, caviar and salt and wax, amber, precious stones, porcelain and glass: dreams of such fervent inaccuracy that even while I dreamed them I was forced to correct the picture . . ." (T, 176), demonstrating not only his romantic bent toward the world but his ignorance of both the firm and the mechanistic, capitalistic aspect of modern western society. At this point, of course, he knows nothing of his future life in England, but since Charlock has been a scientist all his life, we wonder why he has not yet detected more of the mathematical precision with which Julian has proceeded in directing the "western" end of the firm. When Charlock first moves to England with Benedicta he remarks on "the brave new chrysadamantine world of Charlock's nuptial London," with its "mysteries," "great achievements," and "expensive cars," and after this introspection he concludes that "It is not I who speak, Lord: it is my culture speaking through me" (T, 199). It is indeed his culture speaking through him, for he has no concept of what England will bring him in the future. The things he sees now are pleasant things (although "mysteries" is an ambiguous term), and this culture has not even begun to inform him of what he is to find, to learn, to become in England. Charlock is a cultural adolescent and has much to discover of the western world through his experiences in England.

Soon after his arrival he is childishly giddy about what the firm has promised him and tells Benedicta "about the thrilling activities of

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Charlock in London" (*T*, 205). For him, at this stage in his maturation process, the events are thrilling; he is being given the mechanical ends to his scientific theoretical means, and he is justifiably excited. He does not, however, make the connection between the ends and the location of the ends, nor is he making the connection which would have informed him that the true psychological center of the firm is somewhere between the mystical east and the mechanistic west. Julian, who understands the division all along, attempts to rectify the separation by naming the large English country house Cathay and decorating it accordingly. When Charlock begins to live there with Benedicta he discovers the obvious connection: "I divined that this old house with its musty gawkish features offered a sort of mental association with Stamboul— . . . Shades of Baden and Pau—yes, that is what made her feel so at home, so at one with it all" (*T*, 216–17). Benedicta, at this time, needs Istanbul to remain Benedicta, or at least that is what Charlock and Julian believe. This house is also the scene of three major cathartic events: Benedicta's confrontation with the mirrors and her toe, Mark's confrontation with the water which leads Charlock to weep his "way right back to my solitary childhood, back to the breast, back into the very womb which is the only memory we know about" (*T*, 340), and Mark's final, fatal confrontation with Abel.

This country house, though, is an introduction, for both the reader and Charlock, to a different England, and the English countryside is quite different from London and Toybrook, both as a setting for events in the novels and as an influence on the characters' development. Note the change in Charlock's attitude when he moves from the city with its "purple-nosed crowds of milling hierophants, busy buying tokens of the miracle—poor pink-witted, tallow-scraping Socialist mobs" to the country, which "now slowly became an enchanted forest—a medieval illustration to Malory" (*T*, 267–68).

After Charlock's attempted escape, Mark's death, and Charlock's initiation into maturity at the end of *Tunc*, his view of the English countryside in *Nunquam* reflects his new outlook. Benedicta (the "new" Benedicta) offers the first clue when she, in passing, identifies Julian as the head of "Western" Merlin's (my emphasis), and the division of east and west becomes even clearer to Charlock. Western Merlin's means English Merlin's and the point of the west placing its emphasis on mechanization and science and its seeming disregard for human life and humanistic values is brought home to Charlock, startlingly, by his associate Marchant, who sees a picture of Toybrook in the newspaper and identifies it as Belsen.

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Durrell brings this separation into even sharper focus when London becomes the setting again. Here the "western" side of society comes to the fore when the mechanical Iolanthe and the cathedral of St. Paul come together. Charlock observes: "St. Paul's is of course more an engineering feat than any of the other cathedrals and naturally much less aesthetically beautiful" (N, 215). It is fitting, in Durrell's depiction of the modern world, that a reproduction of a human being should "die" in a mechanical exercise in architecture which passes itself off as a house of God. Vibart says: "But if the Oriental end of the firm handles products which give it rather an old-fashioned air, the London end is fully aware of contemporary standards and demands" (N, 222). So is Julian, so is the reader, and so, by the end of *Nunquam*, is Charlock. As he says, looking back on it all: "It was much more than the facts which mattered, which had shaped their peculiar destinies; it was also place" (N, 35).

¹ Lawrence Durrell, *Nunquam* (New York: Dutton, 1970), p. 49. Subsequent references to this volume will be identified in the text with an N and a page notation.

² For Durrell's own comments on the relationship between the two, see *Spirit of Place: Letters and Essays on Travel* (New York: Dutton, 1969). For critics' comments see Lawrence W. Markert, "Symbolic Geography: D. H. Lawrence and Lawrence Durrell," *Deus Loci*, 5, No. 1 (1981), 90-101; and Harry R. Stoneback, "Et in Alexandria Ego: Lawrence Durrell and the Spirit of Place," *Mid-Hudson Language Studies*, 5 (1982), 115-28.

³ Lawrence Durrell, *Tunc* (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 18. Subsequent references to this volume will be identified in the text with a T and a page notation.

⁴ See my article, "Spengler's Theory of Architecture in Durrell's *Tunc* and *Nunquam*," *Deus Loci*, 5, No. 1 (1981), 272-80, for detail on this.

⁵ Discussing the "west" and his attitude toward conveying a message to our part of the world, Durrell has stated that "literature must now compete for attention with the instant thrills and horrors of contemporary history, newspaper headlines, posters, and television programmes, and therefore must make an almost brutally direct impact on the reader (G. S. Fraser, *Lawrence Durrell, Writers and Their Work* [Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1970]), p. 14. Stephen Spender predicted this response when he wrote in *The Struggle of the Modern* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1963), p. 83, that "realization is the primary gesture of modernism, the determination to invent a new style in order to express the deeply felt change in the modern world."

Sebastian: or, Ruling Passions: **Searches and Failures**

BY WILLIAM L. GODSHALK

Sebastian: or, Ruling Passions, like the other novels of *The Avignon Quintet*, has a dual function reflected in the dual titles that all five novels bear. First, the novels function as parts of a series, each telling its particular segment of the story, each segment dovetailing with the segments that come before and after. Second, each novel is, in great part, complete within itself, and each offers its own vision and suggests its own way of interpreting events. Indeed, the techniques and forms of each are different, ranging from the first person narration that dominates *Monsieur* to the surrealism and narrative breakdown of *Quinx*. In this essay, I wish to explore some aspects of the double function in *Sebastian*.

As part of its function in telling a segment of the story, *Sebastian* carries on what I call the "stripping of Constance." In the previous novel, *Constance*, her husband Sam is first alienated from her and then dies in a foolish war accident, killed by British artillery. Her brother, Hilary, a British spy, is captured and executed by the Germans in France, and her friend Nancy Quiminal is executed as a traitor by the French. These are her major losses in *Constance*. In *Sebastian*, she must confront the actuality of her sister's death. Affad her lover is murdered, apparently in her stead, by Mnemidis, and then her colleague Schwartz commits suicide, unable to confront his own guilt. Constance's life seems to be geared to a succession of deaths, and her career becomes part of a larger pattern of failure and disaster.

I

When Affad, before returning to Egypt near the beginning of the novel, says goodbye to Blanford, Blanford responds with what purports

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to be an explanation, but which adds its own questions. Blanford says: "I know you will come back. I have begun to see a little way into the pattern, the apparent confusion is beginning to make sense."¹ What "pattern"? What "confusion"? Does this pattern concern Constance's losses? If we expect clarification from Blanford, we do not get it. He continues with a discussion of his relationship with Sutcliffe. Why? What does Blanford's relationship with Sutcliffe have to do with Affad and his return to Geneva? We are left on our own to explain this passage and its relevance.

Blanford says that he went to Egypt "in the hope of ridding [himself] of Sutcliffe." "I was afraid of the man on my back" (5). In this passage, I sense that Blanford is turning a "real" character (in terms of the fiction) into a symbol; that is, he is fictionalizing the real. Sutcliffe is not a fiction who strangely becomes real, but a character upon whom Blanford projects his need to "concretise" the "Socratic Voice." As Blanford jests, "The creature is alive, he is coming to lunch." Sutcliffe, on his part, accepts his role as a symbol and jokes about being Blanford's fiction. It is Blanford who draws the distinction between symbol and real character; the symbol "can do everything but love. That you must do for yourself" (5). Sutcliffe, as we know from the past novels and find again in *Quinx*, can and, indeed, does love—both Pia and Sabine.

Later in *Sebastian*, Bruce Drexel arrives in Geneva, visits Blanford, and leaves him with the cryptic comment: "your novel about the matter is finished" (172). The comment requires expansion: "your novel" appears to be *Monsieur*; "the matter" is Drexel's *ménage à trois* with the French couple he calls "the two ogres" (171), but whom Blanford calls Piers and Sylvie.

These passages suggest a way of looking at *Monsieur* as well as a way of interpreting Affad's role in this novel—and perhaps in the sequence as a whole. "How skilfully we can untangle the delusions of others!" Schwartz exclaims as he contemplates his suicide. "Yet when it comes to one's own, one is powerless not to believe in them, not to swallow our self-manufactured fictions!" (185). From the vantage point of *Sebastian*, I see *Monsieur* as entirely Blanford's self-manufactured fiction, his attempt to project a possible future for himself and others, his fictionalizing of characters who inhabit the "real" world of the story. For the purposes of creating a novel, both Sutcliffe and Drexel have been turned into "fictions." And in the final pages of *Monsieur*, Blanford fictionalizes himself, projecting his own possible future, a future in which he is unable to walk, in which Constance as the Duchess of Tu

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marries someone else, has children, and dies, and in which Blanford exists as a lonely old man. Drexel wonders about this future: "it only remains for you to see if we are going to live it according to your fiction or according to new fact, no?" (172). The four novels following *Monsieur* suggest that this initial projection of a possible future is, in terms of the "real" story, incorrect. Sutcliffe does not commit suicide; Constance, apparently, falls in love with Blanford; Blanford regains the use of his legs, and so on.

But how does Affad fit into the "pattern" that is apparently emerging from the "confusion"? One thing I notice is that Blanford's role in *Sebastian* is minimal. Unlike the other novels in the series where he is seen as a central figure, as creator of *Monsieur*, as husband of Livia, as lover of Constance, as adventurer in Egypt, *Sebastian* reveals a basically passive, bed-ridden Blanford: he is visited from time to time by his friends; they tell him stories, but the action is not his. We may feel that, indeed, Affad displaces Blanford as the central male consciousness in the novel, that Affad becomes Blanford's surrogate. "Be ye versions of one another, says the Bible!" (144), jests Blanford in another context.² As Blanford travels to Egypt in *Constance* in order to escape from Sutcliffe and the European war, Affad travels to Europe in order to escape his own death urge as well as his commitment to the gnostic secret society that will mandate his sacrificial murder. As Blanford is almost killed in Egypt by British guns and by the war he has attempted to escape, so Affad dies in Geneva, killed by an Egyptian psychotic. On his part, Blanford must deal with Sutcliffe and the symbolism with which Blanford himself has endowed him; as his surrogate, Affad must deal with Constance and what she symbolizes for him—a strange mixture of love and rational analysis.

Ideologically the novel centers upon the struggle between Eastern metaphysics and Western rationalism, especially as these are embodied in Constance and Schwartz and in Affad and the Prince. The two poles are certainly not absolute or unmediated, but they are distinctly presented in the novel. Constance champions the forces of rationality and life-affirmation. For example, she wishes both to understand and control Mnemidis, who is himself a figure of Egyptian non-rationality.³ She believes that life should be maintained and can be understood and controlled: "Eastern metaphysics was quite foreign to her study" (27).

Although Affad may also believe in control and understanding, his concern is not with life, but with death. Sutcliffe points out that Affad "is part of a tradition which hopes to interrogate death itself" (81), and Affad comes to realize "the enormous attraction of death, and the secret

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lust for it which animates human beings. Fear and lust" (47). He accepts "death as an adventure" (44). If Constance is the European doctor whose business is the cure of the material body (Freud is one of the "three great poets of matter" [21]), Affad is the Eastern mystic whose preoccupation is with the Other World.

In terms of the action, both preoccupations are found wanting, and the novel concentrates on the failures of human control—on accidents and ironies. As Constance reminds Affad, "destiny may well be preparing to make an end of us in the next five minutes. We could be run over by a taxi" (151). Mnemidis is a central figure in the concatenation of human failures, and his stay at the psychiatric clinic underlines a series of failures. Both Schwartz and Constance are unable to make any progress in his analysis. He is too unstable to be cured; his personalities are legion. Nor can he be controlled physically; the giant Pierre is no match for him. So much for European control.

But Mnemidis' career suggests—more indirectly—that Egyptian control is just as fallible. Early in the novel, Mnemidis tells a story of being used as "a passive instrument" to commit a murder. He is commissioned to kill his lover by a "little group," and the lover apparently knows that he is to be killed: "You know this is with my *full* consent? Don't be afraid to act if they ask!" (15). Later, when we learn of Affad's gnostic death cult, we can hardly resist the idea that Mnemidis is used as their regular instrument—and that he will be used to carry out the death sentence against Affad.

However, according to Affad's beliefs, he must know when he is going to die so that he can be a dynamic part of the chain of human sacrifice: "So I feel that without that knowledge I am passing on a feeble signal" (150). Unfortunately, the letter that is supposed to convey the date goes astray,⁴ fails to reach its true destination, and ends up in the hands of Mnemidis, who claims that he has no knowledge of its existence. Because of another series of failures—we may say—the date can be learned in no other way. Affad thus has no idea when he will die, and his death plan fails.

Moreover, the letter itself, had it reached Affad, would have failed to give him a precise date—according to Mnemidis, who, I admit, is a rather unreliable witness (106). Nor does Mnemidis seem predisposed to carry out any death sentence against Affad—even though he gets a mysterious letter from Egypt. Does that letter instruct Mnemidis to kill Affad? We are never told. In fact, Mnemidis has decided—apparently on his own hook—to murder Constance who, he feels, has annoyed him with all her attempts to control him. In the meanwhile, Affad becomes

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fevered, is wrapped in Constance's hooded bathrobe, and, while she is out to get drugs to help relieve his symptoms, is murdered by Mnemidis—taken for Constance since his face is to the wall.

The entire story reveals the vanity of human wishes. No one is in control, and all goals are frustrated. Mnemidis kills the wrong person; Affad dies without prior knowledge, caught in a mind-altering delirium; Constance's lover—and patient—dies; and Mnemidis—her psychiatric patient—escapes to Egypt. So much for anyone's control.

The failures begin with Affad's inability to refrain from loving Constance. In view of his "*engagements*" with "the seekers," the Prince informs him, "You had no *right* to fall in love" (1). Constance's failure as an analyst is not confined to the case of Mnemidis. As the novel ends, she allows herself to be seduced by a patient, Sylvie, and becomes her lesbian lover—an affair presented as a failure of the patient-analyst relationship. Schwartz cannot face the realities of his own guilt and chooses suicide instead, which, Constance suggests, "they had both always despised" (184).⁵ But this judgment may itself be part of Constance's failure to understand her analytic partner. Earlier in the action, the reader sees Schwartz as a man "sick to death of this world and its works." Schwartz feels "the thick sediment of despair" rise in his soul, a sediment that "dragged him always towards suicide—the suicide which always seemed to him so inevitable. One day it would claim him, of that he was sure" (22–23). This description does not sound like that of a person who "despises" suicide. The point is that failure is suggested in the largest and smallest details, and is mirrored comically in Lord Galen's futile quest to identify the cornerstones of culture or in his decision to have himself crucified in a bawdy house. In the largest frame of reference, Western Civilization itself seems to be failing. Schwartz exclaims, "Our whole civilisation is enacting the fall of Lucifer, of Icarus!" (21). This is a novel in which little or nothing works, and where "entropy is the new sigil" (21).

And when things do work, it is not the result of rational planning. The cure of Affad's apparently autistic son is a case in point. Constance rejects the use of kittens and toys. "It is not," she claims, "just a question of motor response one is looking for, but a reaction at a deeper level, which can only come from inside himself. How can we help that?" (69). Her last question remains unanswered—until, inadvertently, Constance wears a perfume called *Jamais de la Vie* (i.e., "absolutely not," or in modern slang, "no way"). It turns out to be the scent worn by the child's mother, and Constance theorizes: "perhaps this is what had given her such an immediate associative transference with the child" (85). She's

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not sure. So much for her deliberate plan "to break his psychic reverie" (71). Failure of nerve, mistaken identity, fortuitous action, the non-rational and the irrational—these are central to the novel.

The metaphysical villain of the action is entropy—a concept that recurs throughout the novel. Schwartz asks, "To what extent have we the right to interfere with the principle of entropy, the cosmic submission which subsumes everything—the death-drift of the world?" (175). The novel has already provided a possible answer in a quotation from an unnamed philosopher: "Everything is conquered by submission, even submission itself, even as matter is conquered by entropy, and truth by its opposite. Even entropy, so apparently absolute in its operation, is capable, if left to itself, of conversion into a regenerative form. The phoenix is no myth!" (154). But in terms of the action, the phoenix does seem to be mythic. The novel seems oriented toward death, rather than rebirth.

In the final pages, even the form of the novel appears to fall apart. Language becomes random, and meaning and identity break down. Blanford compares the final departure from Geneva to the *Canterbury Tales*. "The setting forth of the pilgrims, eh?" asks Sutcliffe, and then comments that it is more like an exodus of refugees: "No single complete unit like a couple, all broken up and fragmented, and in dispersion" (197). Sutcliffe goes on to complain about his role as "etheric double." And Blanford replies that "Socrates was only the etheric double of Plato, he was not real so much as *true*, that is why he was so neurotic—all those fevers and fears and visions! Plato saved himself by shoving them on to Socrates' account. . . . I hope you will do the same for me." Sutcliffe responds, "Synaesthesia!" Blanford assures him that he is, indeed, correct, and Sutcliffe says, "They will not understand." Blanford believes "they" will: "You will loom without a precise meaning like the statue in Don Giovanni, blocking the whole action, and gradually acquire symbolic weight because of your lack of personality in the human sense. Your speech is not that of a person but of an oracle." Sutcliffe's response is: "A semantic word-bazaar?" (198). And so on. Now, some sense can be made of this interchange, I grant, and the theme of surrogation and the problem of identity are emphasized as they are throughout the five novels. But the dialogue is surely problematic. "Synaesthesia" in either its physiological or its psychological meaning does not work precisely. Synaesthesia functions within one body, not between two. Who are the "they" that will not understand? Why will Sutcliffe lack a "precise meaning?" To my ear, this all seems to be verbal playing, where meaning is only a secondary

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consideration. And it is this kind of disjointed chitchat that ends the novel. Nothing is resolved, and the train in which the characters ride back to Provence flies on.

Nevertheless, Affad's assertion that "entropy" can become a "regenerative form" is left open. The reader may have to wait until the final novel of the series for at least a partial answer. The discontinuous form of the final pages of *Sebastian* is expanded and elaborated in *Quinx*, which is indeed metaphorically entropic. The failure of rational continuity is emphasized; the action becomes surreal and ultimately inconclusive. Perhaps *Quinx* is the "Indian novel" described by Blanford (201)—as well as the answer to Affad's dream of regenerative entropy, entropy as aesthetic form.

Of course, the polarity between Eastern and Western thought in the novel is not absolute as the concept of an entropic Indian novel suggests. Attempts at syncretism and incorporation are various. Max, Lord Galen's former major domo and boxing teacher, reappears in *Sebastian* as a yogi, in his own words, "a yoga-maker and teacher" (25). Listening to Max describe yoga's ability to reduce stress, Constance thinks: "After all, what was her medical practice about if it was not concerned with the problems of stress in its extreme forms? Why should she not study this ancient method for a while and see what bearing it had upon her own formulations?" (26). Affad claims that he can describe yoga "in scientific terms" (31) and praises Constance's "investigations, for that is what they are" (32). But in the action of the novel, these investigations lead no place. Constance does not incorporate yoga into her therapies, nor does she seem to use yogic principles or *asanas* in her own life. For Constance—and the narrative—Max's science of yoga is a cul-de-sac.

Affad's attempts at syncretism appear to be no more cogent than Constance's. Affad contends that "Einstein's non-discrete field, Groddeck's 'It', and Pursewarden's 'heraldic universe' were all one and the same concept and would easily answer to the formulations of Patanjali" (28). Although Affad vigorously defends this position, the Prince objects: "You have influenced a serious scientist [Constance] with all this Indian mumbo-jumbo. And you, with a degree in economics and humanities!" (31). Of course, all this to-do over syncretic thought that unites East and West leads no place, and it is ironic that the Prince should be horrified at Affad's acceptance of yogic principles. Both he and Affad accept without question "their Manichean creed" (37), a creed that sounds very much like "mumbo-jumbo" to my Western ears. To me, Schwartz's skepticism is well founded: "If driven to it Schwartz

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would even quote Kipling on the question of East being East" (28).⁶ Affad himself is aware that under his "veneer of sophistication and formal culture" there lives "the initial gnostic Manichee born of those long deliberations and fasts and mental exercises" (40). The quests for an ultimate union between East and West in the novel are all found to be failures—failures that are reflected in the central failure of Constance's love affair with Affad.

Sebastian can be seen as fitting into a general pattern of failure in the *Quintet*. Throughout the novels, there is a growing sense that characters have little or no control of their destinies. Madness, death, war seem to be uncontrollable. Human relationships are problematic, and divorce and estrangement are recurrent. Attempts at foreseeing the future appear to be doomed to failure.⁷ All in all, the series of novels underlines the chance quality of success, the fragility of associations and relations, the ineffectuality of the human will, the probability of things turning out in ways that have not been foreseen, the inability to control reality as well as the artist's own inability to control absolutely his medium. *Sebastian* surveys a variety of attempts to control life—from yoga to psychoanalysis, from "Malabars" to war, from art to ritual—and reveals that none of them, finally, works. Disorder is uncontained and triumphant in its random way.

II

Throughout his career, Durrell's style has been marked by its emphasis on similitude and similarity, by its use of simile, by its constant turning to *like* and *as if* to introduce a striking and even grotesque image.⁸ *Sebastian* carries on this style. Affad feels that kissing Lily is "like kissing the face of a rag doll" (56). Lily is "like a butterfly born with only one wing" (55), and she feels that reality is "like a gigantic crossword puzzle" (54). To Affad, she sounds "like a sort of huge monkey," and he holds his flashlight—"like a douche" (53)—to reveal his own face. Each action, each happening, each situation has its peculiar simile, and, although the simile works differently in each instance, the total effect of the pattern of similes is to suggest an interlocking world of similarities and reflections, a surreal world where a woman may remind her former husband of a monkey, a rare bird, a butterfly, and a rag doll, where one image merges rather grotesquely with another. If you will, the similes underline the deliquescence of reality, its inability to remain constant, the shifting quality of what we take, from moment to moment, to be permanent.

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But Durrell's similitudes go beyond the use of verbal similes, and he suggests similarities between characters and incidents, similarities that point to previously unacknowledged meanings and interpretations. For example, before Sebastian arrives back in Geneva both Mnemidis, his eventual murderer, and Constance, his lover, have been on holiday: Mnemidis in a drug-induced sleep, Constance at the lake house. Upon his return, both are completely "rested." The comparison invites further reflection, asking the reader to consider other, more submerged, similitudes. In fact, both are destructive for Affad. If Mnemidis ultimately destroys his body, Constance destroys his spiritual alliance to the gnostic cult. At his secret inquisition in Alexandria, Affad asks: "'To be punished, admonished, expelled, executed—whatever you may decide is suitable for this unheard of act of treachery. Even now I find it inexplicable to myself. I fell in *love*.' The word fell like a slab of stone closing upon a tomb [to Affad's ears, is implied]" (39).⁹ However, as soon as he gets home and in bed, "Everything that he had simply abolished when talking to his judges returned like a tide and swallowed up his emotions"—i.e., "dreams of the forgotten Constance, memories of their love" (42). And, after a suitable reluctance, Affad returns to her bed and decides to go away with her (154). The reader may feel that, if Mnemidis is after his body, Constance is after his soul. Both characters are there to destroy part of the man, and, at least from one point of view, they both succeed. Mnemidis' success is obvious; and Constance's success at wooing Affad from his gnostic faith cannot easily be ignored. After all, he dies in her bed, dressed in her robe, after deciding to flee to Provence with her.

But the similarity between Affad and Mnemidis is also suggested. If Affad dies dressed like a woman, Mnemidis kills him dressed like a woman. Both murdered and murderer are in drag. The coincidence is too striking to be artistically accidental—and again asks the reader to consider possible reasons. First, some kind of identity between the two is indicated, and I suggest that the unifying factor is instability of personality. Mnemidis' instability is acknowledged. Constance terms him "Mnemidis the impersonator" (10), and Mnemidis later describes the fragmenting of his personality: "Then gradually the voices came, I developed a whole repertoire, it was like becoming a hotel with someone different in each room" (14). And Affad exhibits a similar inability to hold his shape: is he gnostic devotee or Western-style lover? Banker, humanist, economist, philosopher, he is a man so various that he might be, not one, but all mankind's epitome.

Second, that both men are dressed like women underlines the irony

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of the murder. Mnemidis, who, dressed as a nun, has just performed fellatio on a truck driver,¹⁰ comes to perform revenge on his female therapist. It is possible that he is motivated by the homosexual's submerged hatred of women.¹¹ Instead, he kills a man who has just had heterosexual intercourse with his lover. Affad in his turn distrusts women. It is the Prince who articulates Affad's thoughts on the matter: "It always makes me nervous when a woman intervenes. Things usually get into a tangle" (58). Ironically, the "woman" who finally intervenes in this case is a man. And Affad is murdered by a mirror image of himself. Is this a strange kind of surrogate suicide?

During his inquisition, Affad studies "the spatulate hands of the one who had spoken his name and [feels] the vague stirrings of familiarity" (38). He asks himself who it could be, and considers several names, concluding that it is "impossible to be sure" (38). But the reader is signaled to watch for spatulate hands, and he finds them attached to "the alienist from Alexandria" (96), a man whom the narrator refuses to name, a man who has come to Geneva to free Mnemidis and take him back to Alexandria. The similitude here seems to suggest an identity. The inquisitor and the doctor are one person. Why? The reader is never told, and the entire affair is shrouded in mystery. But the curious reader will undoubtedly speculate.

The reader who comes to the *Quintet* from *The Alexandria Quartet* will be tempted to identify the Alexandrian doctor as Balthazar, whom Affad thinks of earlier in the novel (2).¹² Balthazar is interested in esoteric religion, and we may surmise that he is one of the gnostics. Indeed, we are surely right in our guess that he is one of the three mysterious inquisitors responsible for arranging Affad's death. None of this speculation is contradicted by the plot. If we accept the foregoing scenario as the story behind the plot, then it follows that Affad was to have been ritually slain in Egypt, not in Geneva. Since Mnemidis identifies himself as the passive instrument (15) of murder, it seems obvious that Balthazar is in Geneva to retrieve that instrument for Affad's ritual demise.

But there are other similes in the narrative that draw the attention of the reader. Although Constance is presented as a full-time therapist, the narrative concentrates on only two of her therapies: Mnemidis' and Affad's son's. In point of handling, the therapies are entirely different: Mnemidis' sessions are verbal, and he is given a drug-induced holiday; young Affad is handled non-verbally, and no medications are used. But it is surely significant that both clients are Egyptian males, and that they suggest different aspects of Affad himself: Mnemidis his desire to

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destroy, his son his desire to create. Both of these aspects are apparent in Affad's character throughout the novel. His relationship with Constance involves his desire to have children. He recurrently thinks: "I had been trying to make her pregnant" (3). In contrast, his relationship to the gnostic cult emphasizes his desire to destroy—to die. Constance's demand that she and Schwartz not turn Mnemidis over to the civil authorities (10), and her subsequent inability to cure him—these things lead directly to the death of her lover. At the same time, her inadvertent cure of the son at least gives her lover a chance for temporal immortality through the gene pool. Although she remains sterile herself, her identification through perfume with the boy's natural mother allows her to redeem him from a dreadful autism. The relative success and failure of the two cases balance the tension between creation and destruction in the novel.

The final similitudes that I wish to draw attention to are those among Galen's comic ritual murder, Affad's mistaken murder, and Schwartz's suicide. Sutcliffe narrates the story of Galen's misadventures: "It is nothing less than the Crucifixion of Lord Galen at the hands of Mrs Gilchrist and her girls, a sight of great dramatic and symbolic significance" (136–37). Rather intrusively, Sutcliffe calls for a symbolic reading, and given the propensities of the individual reader, he may or may not get it. But what we do get in the Galen episode is proleptic satire. Galen sees himself as the saviour of Western Culture, sacrificing himself nightly in the brothels of Geneva, searching "quite disinterestedly for the meaning of a word like culture in our time" (128). His Ulysses-like search¹³ is mocked. The point of this apparent digression is its relationship to Affad's quest. Both characters are seen in Christ-like terms. Mnemidis echoes Christ as he kills Affad: "*Consummatum est!*" and Galen undergoes a mock crucifixion that is comically unsuccessful. The effect of Galen's mock sacrifice is to undercut the pretensions of Affad's quest. Affad, quite seriously, envisions himself as a kind of Christ figure as he prepares for his ritual murder/suicide. He thinks: "What if this bitter cup should be taken from him, just because of a momentary weakening of his resolve?" (40).¹⁴ The allusion to Christ in his thought indicates his preoccupation with self-sacrifice.

Schwartz's suicide—following hard upon Affad's inadvertent death—underscores the failure implicit in Affad's death. The two characters are linked imaginatively. Both have wives named Lily. As we have seen, Affad images his wife as a "monkey," while Schwartz just as strangely sees his wife as a "very old and half-mad baboon" (186). Schwartz performs his death ritual with "old skull-cap" and "prayer

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shawl" (187). Superficially, it is exactly the kind of death Affad had desired, but did not achieve: carefully planned, consciously accepted. However, Schwartz's suicide results from his failure of nerve, his inability to face guilt from the past. The point is that in this series of similitudes all three are failures in their own distinct ways.

III

As I look back over the novel, I realize that Sebastian Affad is not the protagonist. The novel may carry his name, but the center of the narrative is Constance, and the plot revolves to a great extent around her relationships with the men in the story: her love for Affad; her affection for her mentor, Schwartz; her therapeutic relationships with Mnemidis and young Affad; her friendships with Blanford, Sutcliffe, and so on. Although there are other women in the novel, the narrator's spotlight never falls on them; they are briefly characterized and dismissed. Constance functions in a man's world, and it is hardly a world without prejudice against women. The Prince announces that prejudice on the novel's second page: "Since contraception things have changed. Women were once unique events in the life of a man; now woman is a mere commodity like *hay*. Availability has bred contempt" (2). Later Affad begins a sentence that he does not care to finish: "But of course once a woman disturbs a sequence of events by a rash act . . ." (57). But his conclusion is obvious. Later still, Sutcliffe imagines the Prince saying to Affad, "You see, the *moment* a woman interferes everything goes wrong" (80)—which is a close approximation of what he does say (57).

And, it perhaps goes without pointing out, Constance's career in this male world is a failure. Through a series of inadvertent acts—she leaves her apartment door ajar—she allows her lover to be murdered. Her mentor, after spending the evening with her, goes off to commit suicide. One of the things that strikes me about Constance is her lack of overt emotional response to the deaths of Affad and Schwartz. After the death of Affad, Schwartz himself notes: "It seemed more appropriate that she should cry, should give public expression to her shock—not just sit bereft and stunned and tearless in a chair with blood all over her skirt" (164). A little later she jokes about Affad's vision of being cut up "in chunks like a pineapple" (165), and again Schwartz is uneasy, does "not at all like the note of her laugh at this awkward pleasantry" (165). Listening to Schwartz's death tapes, "inside herself the profound depression grew and grew The loss of Schwartz rose

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like a wall in her consciousness, almost as if he had been a husband, a mate, and not merely an intimate friend. Yet she was dry-eyed, composed, and kept on her features a sardonic expression suitable to such an ironic situation: but it was a pitiful boast and she knew it" (193). Instead of mourning, Constance goes to bed with Sylvie—"a reaction from the death of Schwartz. She had been driven out of control by it and from some depths of inner numbness had lost all power of evaluation" (196). It is no particular wonder that this novel ends with Constance in full retreat. Having failed in her relationships with men, she accepts the lesbian embraces of Sylvie; and having met disaster in Geneva, she, her lover, the young Affad, and their close friends, board a rapid train for Provence. The point is that Constance's inappropriate responses and her failure properly to confront these losses lead to her loss of control and to her ill-fated love affair with Sylvie—an affair, we find in *Quinx*, that ends disastrously. Constance's reactions or lack of them are part of the pattern of failure that marks the novel.

IV

In my reading of *Sebastian*, I have emphasized the failures—perhaps over-emphasized the failures. But in Durrell's fictional world these failures are not the stuff of deep tragedy. Rather, they are the elements of human comedy. Given half a chance, Durrell's characters will fall in the mud and comically wave their arms. Pratfalls are the rule rather than the exception. His characters will proudly assert that their partial visions are, in fact, *the only way* to see things properly. The working out of the plot, in contradistinction, emphasizes the fallibility of all versions of the truth. Revise, rethink as they will, Durrell's characters are all monkeys and baboons trying to make sense of the most intricate crossword puzzle of all—reality; and Durrell's fiction emphasizes their recurrent, serio-comic attempts to do so. I fear, ultimately, that the readers of his fiction are caught in the same comic paradox as his characters and that we, also, are no closer to the Truth than they.

¹ *Sebastian: or, Ruling Passions* (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 5. Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. The Faber (1983) and the Viking (1984) first editions have the same pagination.

² Cf. Sutcliffe's scribbled note: "The same people are also others without realising it" (8).

³ The narrator calls him the "joker in the pack," the wild card, equally "ripe for black mischief or the felicity of pure godhead" (160).

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⁴ Constance explains to Schwartz: "the letter in question was misdirected by Aubrey Blanford's stupid servant and I took charge of it, hoping to see Affad before he left and give it to him. However I didn't, and so I still have the letter" (75-76). She places it in her Bible from which it is taken by Mnemidis (106). Later she claims to have "stolen" the letter in order to keep it from Affad (148), but even if this is true, her plan misfires when Mnemidis steals the letter from her.

⁵ I assume that this is Constance's thought when I learn that she is listening to the tapes (188) and when she reiterates the thought (192). However, the thought may be Schwartz's or the narrator's.

⁶ Later Schwartz thinks: "Larger than life or larger than death—which? The two ways, East and West!" (176).

⁷ Perhaps the worst example is Lord Galen's firm conviction that Hitler will prove to be a pro-Jewish leader of Germany. See *Livia: or, Buried Alive* (New York: Penguin, 1984), pp. 123-28.

⁸ The phrase "so to speak" is also used to signal a similitude. E.g., "She was lost, washed overboard, so to speak" (196).

⁹ The emphasis and the simile have, for me, a comic effect, and I think the reader is meant to smile if not laugh at Affad's confession.

¹⁰ I make this assumption from the narrator's comment: "the seduction was consummated" (118).

¹¹ Schwartz may imply as much when he wonders "whether the arrival of a woman doctor on the scene would not aggravate matters" (10).

¹² See, e.g., *Balthazar* (London: Faber, 1958), p. 18, and cf. the "goat-like" face of the unnamed doctor, *Sebastian*, p. 96.

¹³ Joyce is invoked: "According to Joyce the modern Ulysses is a Dublin Jew of the most despicable qualities, the lowest character, the foulest morals; and his wife even lower. This is what our civilisation has come to . . ." (126), says Lord Galen.

¹⁴ Cf. Matthew 26.39, and John 18.11.

“The Pure and Sacred Readjustment of Death”: Connections Between Lawrence Durrell’s *Avignon Quintet* and the Writings of D. H. Lawrence

BY LAWRENCE W. MARKERT

It would be like this after the atomic explosion, he was thinking—just clouds of memoranda filling the air—human memoranda. The sum of all their parts whirled in the death-drift of history—motes in a vast sunbeam.¹

Lawrence Durrell’s narrator, Blanford, bleakly meditates on the possible nuclear destruction of civilization in the fifth volume of *The Avignon Quintet*, *Quinx: or, The Ripper’s Tale*. World War II is over, and the characters still remaining from the preceding volumes have returned to Avignon, “the City of the Popes,” to enact the final stages of the quest for the lost treasure of the Knights Templar.

What is apparent in this quotation and even more deeply throughout the whole *Quintet* is the profound echo of the voice of D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence wrote in “The Crown” during the early stages of World War I:

So circumscribed within the outer nullity, we give ourselves up to the flux of death, to analysis, to introspection, to mechanical war and destruction, to humanitarian absorption in the body politic, the poor, the birth-rate, the mortality of infants, like a man absorbed in his own flesh and members, looking for ever at himself.²

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Lawrence's influence on Durrell is, of course, not newly sprung in *The Avignon Quintet*. It goes back as far as Durrell's earliest writings and letters. And Durrell alludes to Lawrence in discussions and interviews about *The Alexandria Quartet*. For instance, in an interview in *La Stampa*, he comments: "During those years D. H. Lawrence and W. H. Auden influenced me strongly."³ In addition, he refers to him strikingly within the novel *Clea*. Lawrence was supposedly a friend of Pursewarden, who writes about him:

How wonderful the death-struggle of Lawrence: to realise his sexual nature fully, to break free from the manacles of the Old Testament; flashing down through the firmament like a great white struggling man-fish, the last Christian martyr. His struggle is ours—to rescue Jesus from Moses.⁴

Thus in *The Alexandria Quartet* Durrell can be seen as clearly connected to Lawrence. In the *Quintet* Lawrence's struggle to rescue civilization from the manacles of a dying world is even more fascinatingly apparent in the fabric of Durrell's work. The "death-drift" of Durrell's world is remarkably similar to and informed by Lawrence's "flux of death."

One other element, however, has to be brought into the picture in order to appreciate fully the connections between these two writers. We need to take into account the traditions from which their two concepts are drawn. Durrell, although having affinities to English Romanticism, finally relies most intrinsically on the philosophy of gnosticism for his concept. Lawrence, on the other hand, draws directly and deeply on English Romanticism. Indeed, as Colin Clarke has observed, the idea of Romantic dissolution absorbs him: "Like the Romantics Lawrence is endlessly concerned with what Keats had called 'self-destroying'."⁵ This process, which is evoked in John Keats's poem, "Ode to a Nightingale," forms the basis of Lawrence's concept:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known.⁶

Lawrence builds on the idea of dissolution. This concept becomes an integral part of his concern with the negative influence of the dominating will within individuals and, therefore, within society as a whole. World War I, too, was a part of this scheme, for its true roots were within individual consciousness. Finally, he emphasizes the paradox involved in the experience of the "flux of death." He tries to develop a very clear distinction between corruption that is creative and corruption that is not.

Durrell, however, defines his sense of reality as a conflict of Western and Eastern ideals, with gnostic philosophy playing a central

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role in our understanding of this conflict. He too wants relief from materialistic thought which seems only to lead to war. He sees Western thought as dominated by confinement, by what Lawrence refers to as outer nullity. In his lecture "From the Elephant's Back," Durrell gives a fuller explanation of this conflict:

The belief in Christian prayer has been very much eroded. It seems to have been replaced by a communal will to unhappiness which I think we can read into our architecture which breathes confinement, regimentation, heralds of insanity.⁷

Eastern thought can serve as a balance:

By contrast to this attitude, the five skanda pagoda mind, which has begun to enjoy a great vogue, is perhaps equally full of traps though for us it seems to represent a blissfully calm view of reality. This is because it seems to offer a relief from materialistic thought. ("Elephant's Back," 8)

James P. Carley has already identified many of the important concepts which Durrell draws from gnosticism and incorporates into *The Avignon Quintet*. Basic to the gnostic view is the prevailing sense of death which dominates our life. The Prince of Darkness has now become the usurping ruler of our lives and of our reality: "According to gnostic doctrine, as Durrell interprets it, the created mechanical world is a giant trap, attractive to the outside but in fact evil and corrupt and, on closer inspection, self-devouring."⁸ Our day-to-day life, therefore, is dominated by what Durrell calls "death-drift." We assume the world is motivated by the good associated with the Judeo-Christian theology, but actually the Christian ethic is a sham. We are all participating in our own destruction.

Within this framework, the prevailing mood of the entire *Quintet* begins to become clear. World War II is the inevitable result of the "death-drift." It is, in fact, the full manifestation of it. Those involved in the war may try to describe it as merely an aberration, but it is the proof that the world is controlled by the dark god, Monsieur.

The rumblings in Europe that resulted in World War I motivated Lawrence to evaluate more fully the destructive impulse in civilization. The war, he decided, was the inevitable manifestation of the corrupt nature of our civilization. He describes his beliefs not only in his discursive writings during this period, such as "The Crown" (1915) and "The Reality of Peace" (1917), but in many of his novels as well. *Women in Love* also focuses on war, and Lawrence himself writes about it:

There is another novel, sequel to *The Rainbow*, called *Women in Love*. . . . This actually does contain the results in one's soul of the

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war: it is purely destructive, not like *The Rainbow*, destructive—consummating. It is very wonderful and terrifying, even to me who have written it.⁹

Women in Love depicts the qualities on an individual level which led to World War I. The war, in fact, forms a backdrop to the real action of the novel, which is individual struggle for salvation in a world dominated by the destructive impulse.

The impact the war had on Lawrence becomes even clearer in "The Nightmare" chapter of *Kangaroo* (1923), the novel Lawrence wrote in Australia after escaping the confines of England once the war had ended. Consistent with his idea of the "flux of death" in which society was caught, he describes the war as an apocalyptic sign. The world order was ending. The "flux of death" he hoped had reached its apex in World War I. His account of a Zeppelin raid, then, portends the apocalyptic end of the old order:

One evening he and Harriet [Somers and Harriet are thin disguise for Lawrence and Frieda] walked from Platts Lane to the Spaniards Road, across the Heath: and there, in the sky, like some god vision, a Zeppelin, and the searchlights catching it, so that it gleamed like a manifestation in the heavens There it was again, high, high, high, tiny, pale, as one might imagine the Holy Ghost far, far above.¹⁰

Several paragraphs later Lawrence comments again that "It was in 1915 the old world ended" (*Kangaroo*, 240).

Lawrence's letters during this period reinforce the belief that the war portends the end of the old world order. He describes the same Zeppelin scene to Lady Ottoline Morrell:

So it seems our cosmos has burst, burst at last, the stars and moon blown away, the envelope of the sky burst out, and a new cosmos appeared; with a long-ovate, gleaming central luminary, calm and drifting in a glow of light, like a new moon, with its light bursting in flashes on the earth, to burst away the earth also. So it is the end—our world is gone, and we are like dust in the air. (*Letters*, 366)

The imagery in this letter makes clear Lawrence's attitude toward the entire event. The war is the last act of a death-dominated civilization. The Zeppelin becomes an apocalyptic sign. There is some sadness in Lawrence associated with the end of his world, but there is also a considerable amount of joy, for he feels a new era will emerge. Lawrence assumes that this new world will involve a positive form of human existence. Rupert Birkin makes the same observation about the "death-drift" in *Women in Love*. The war may destroy the world as he

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knows it, but the creative force that informs all life will remain. There will, he feels, be a new embodiment:

Well, if mankind is destroyed, if our race is destroyed like Sodom, and there is this beautiful evening with the luminous land and trees, I am satisfied. That which informs it all is there, and can never be lost. After all, what is mankind but just one expression of the incomprehensible. And if mankind passes away, it will only mean that this particular expression is completed and done. That which is expressed, and that which is to be expressed, cannot be diminished. There it is, in the shining evening. Let mankind pass away—time it did. The creative utterances will not cease There will be a new embodiment, in a new way.¹¹

Lawrence's statement in his letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, that "we are like dust in the air," anticipates nicely Durrell's narrator, Blanford, when he meditates in *Quinx* about the results of the atomic explosion. For both authors these apocalyptic experiences are the culmination of ego domination, of the mechanical world. This issue, in fact, relates to the nature of fiction as well. As Durrell points out in his lecture "From the Elephant's Back," "The stable ego of fiction had disintegrated—Lawrence says so in his letters . . ." ("Elephant's Back," 4). And later he says, "Of course long ago the Indians had told us that the notion of the discrete and separate ego was also an illusion—perhaps a dangerous one" ("Elephant's Back," 4). What he begins to describe as a technical problem for the novel becomes quickly a philosophical problem as well. An interest in the nature of the discrete ego, the control of the individual personality, explains his experimentation with voice and character in the *Quintet*. It helps us, as well, to understand the fragmentary quality of *Quinx*, which actually seems to depict in fiction the disintegration of the stable ego in relation to the final stages of the discovery of the Templar treasure. Durrell's concern with the dominance of the ego also explains much of the action that leads up to this final volume, for tied into the "death-drift" of civilization is the dominance of the individual ego within society. The primary neurosis of the age is ego domination. In *Quinx* this problem is identified in relation to the opposition of Eastern and Western ideals. A meditation on the impact of the automobile, which is actually a meditation on power and force, leads to a meditation on the nature of the ego:

Some of this thinking was of course Blanford's when he mounted his hobby horse about the flight of the ego to the West. Indeed she could hear his voice parodying her reflections. "Suddenly the

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human will metastasised, the ego broke loose, took wing in a desire not to conform to nature but to dominate it!" (*Quinx*, 40)

The ego-dominated world is in truth the construction of Monsieur, and it results in the terrible "death-drift." The development of scientific certainties is part of the scheme: "From that moment the hunt for the measurable certainties was on. Death became a constant, the ego was born. Monsieur came down to preside over the human condition" (*Quinx*, 27).

The ego denies the mystery of the world, of nature and of our existence, and asserts its control over the world. The individual will, therefore, becomes paramount. The will and the ego are one. In other words, the assertion of the individual will is the manifestation of the ego-dominated personality. In *Livia* Quatrefages identifies this pattern in relation to his research into the lost treasure. He is trying to explain why the Templars were extinguished. Their heresy might have offered something of a corrective to the prevailing direction of society:

The knights were systematically destroyed by the hooded anonymous butchers of the Inquisition in order to secure the succession of what they now knew was evil—the pre-eminence of matter and will in the world. They were the instruments of Old Nick himself who was not going to have his throne shaken by this superb refusal of the knights; he was not going to submit without a struggle. The death wish against the life wish—God, you know, is only an alibi in all this, only a cover story.¹²

For Quatrefages the Templar mystery, the real treasure, is tied in with the Templars' recognition of the reality of civilization, the death-wish against the life-wish. He believes that they were destroyed to preserve the secret, Monsieur's control, which lies behind the reality of our lives.

Constance: or, Solitary Practices more than any other novel in the *Quintet* deals with the complexities of the individual ego in relation to the "death-drift" of civilization and has in many ways the most immediately perceived connections to Lawrence's vision of love and death. The entire world of Freudian psychology, which Durrell seems to dwell on in *Constance*, is based upon ego strength in relation to repression and defense mechanisms. In some respects, the emergence of Freud is due to the evolution of Western society as an ego-dominated and materialistic structure. Schwarz, talking to himself, identifies this problem: "Any poet will tell you that the basic illness is the ego which, when it swells, engenders stress, dislocating reality."¹³ In *Quinx* we are also told, "Neurosis is the norm for an egopetal culture—Freud exposed the roots as a dentist's drill exposes the pulp chamber of a tooth . . ."

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(*Quinx*, 180). Freud as an intellectual force in the novel, then, emerges as an attempt to deal with the ego-neurosis of the age. But he only serves to enlighten us to neurosis; he cannot offer a full cure. As Durrell says, "psychoanalysis has brought us real treasures of observation and insight which we should not neglect. Of course it does not go far enough, but then nothing does!" ("Elephant's Back," 1). Affad in *Constance* reinforces this perception. He reveres Freud primarily because he enlarged our field of vision. But his real point comes back to the ego problem in general: "The real seed of the neurosis is the belief in the discrete ego; as fast as you cure 'em the contemporary metaphysic which is Judeo-Christianity manufactures more I's to become sick Me's" (*Constance*, 304).

As Durrell suggests, Lawrence's writing on the elimination of the discrete ego formed the springboard for his own interests in this process. In a letter Lawrence wrote to Edward Garnett in 1914 he comments on the direction his thought is taking. He is in the middle of writing *The Rainbow*, and he is evolving a new concept of character:

... I don't care about physiology of matter—but somehow—that which is physic—non-human, in humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element—which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent. (*Letters*, 281)

Lawrence identifies two types of ego and two types of will, one associated with what is individual, ego-dominated, and one which transcends the individual. What he wants is a novel freed from the stable ego so that it may express something more mysterious and universal: "The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond—but I say, 'Diamond, what! This is carbon'" (*Letters*, 282). One element Durrell admires in Lawrence's idea of the novel is the ambition to express what Georg Groddeck calls the "It," a force greater than the individual ego: "Man, then, is himself a function of this mysterious force which expresses itself through him."¹⁴

Lawrence wants to promote the elimination of this stable ego in fiction and life: "We want to realise the tremendous *non-human* quality of life—it is wonderful" (*Letters*, 291). Later, in a letter to Gordon Campbell, he prescribes the necessary death of Egotism: "If you are making a great book on Egotism—and I believe you may be—for God's sake give us the death of Egotism, not the death of the sinner" (*Letters*, 301).

Lawrence works these ideas out more fully in his fiction, particularly in *Women in Love*. Birkin's conflict with Hermione Roddice

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is emblematic of the static will which portends his entrapment and destruction. She represents the ego at its most dominant, which results in a severe form of narcissism: "You've got that mirror, your own fixed will, your immortal understanding, your own tight conscious world, and there is nothing beyond it. There, in the mirror, you must have everything" (*Women*, 35). In "The Reality of Peace" Lawrence describes further the individual will which leads to death:

He has all the repulsive dignity of a static, indomitable will And what is the end? He is benumbed against all life, therefore he needs torture to penetrate him with vital sensation. He is cut off from growth, therefore he finds his fulfilment in the slow and mortal anguish of destruction. He knows no consummation of peace, but falls at last in the great conclusion of death.¹⁵

This passage also alludes to the sexual perversions that emerge. Torture becomes a form of sexual expression, which is an important part of the world dominated by Nazi perversions that Durrell describes in relation to World War II.

The most significant scene in Lawrence's work which depicts the conflicts that emerge as a result of the dominating will or ego is in the "Moony" chapter of *Women in Love*. The moon becomes identified with self-consciousness, with the individual will of Ursula. Birkin reacts to this presence by throwing stones at the moon's reflection in the pond. Birkin says to her, "I want you to drop your assertive *will*, your frightened apprehensive self-insistence, that is what I want. I want you to trust yourself so implicitly that you can let yourself go" (*Women*, 243). Ursula's earlier meditation on her own nature anticipates this conversation:

Unless I set my will, unless I absolve myself from the rhythm of life, fix myself and remain static, cut off from living, absolved within my own will. But better die than live mechanically a life that is a repetition of repetitions. To die is to move on with the invisible. (*Women*, 184)

Durrell's *Constance* forms an interesting parallel to various aspects of Lawrence's work, particularly if we focus on the relationship between Constance and Affad. Affad, in fact, speaks with a Lawrencian voice, and from him Constance learns to seek gentleness as a value: "Gentle with a respect for the other person and a full realisation that the sexual act is a psychic one, the flesh and bone enact but the psyche directs" (*Constance*, 286). But earlier Constance had tried, in the tradition of Hermione and Ursula, to control Affad: "Even now she felt called upon to assert some of her feminine independence, to assert a loving

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domination over him by her sheer physical strength" (*Constance*, 266). Her desire is part of the will which is central to the "death-drift" of civilization. The relationship with Affad, however, burns through the barrier. Constance, like a sleeping beauty and very much echoing Constance Chatterley, is reborn:

The embrace of Affad had in some singular way acted upon her as the drop of scalding olive oil had done upon the cheek of sleeping Eros. Perhaps she had even been cured of that obstinate old dream of all women, to become indispensable to someone's happiness—the running sore of self-esteem, the old dysentery of human narcissism. . . . Or was that too much to hope? (*Constance*, 292)

At this stage in the novel we cannot help but recall that Lawrence had intended to call *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by a different title, *Tenderness*. In this context it is also enlightening to realize that Durrell's original title for *Constance* was *Constance in Love*. And the association becomes even stronger, for Durrell states that he found Lawrence especially appealing because of what he did for sexuality: "Lawrence's discovery of sex and eros was a breakthrough for us Anglo-Saxons. It opened entirely new means for looking at the human psyche" (*La Stampa*, 54). In *Constance* Affad points out that in the "death-drift" of civilization, "We are living out the death of the couple, the basic brick of all culture" (*Constance* 303). The conversation that Constance and Affad have at this point is very similar to those between Ursula and Birkin. Perhaps these associations begin to explain Durrell's original title, which certainly suggests a composite of *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. So when Affad says, "Yet there was nothing between us of a personal sort—it all went on in her head!" (*Constance*, 303), we are reminded of Birkin's conversations with Ursula. And when Constance answers that love is a trick, something done with mirrors, "Love! It's all done by mirrors!" (*Constance*, 303), the image recalls the egotism of Hermione as well as the eroding will of Ursula. As these scenes suggest, then, for both Lawrence and Durrell, the love relationship is central.

Constance in some respects, indeed, can be seen as the central work in the *Quintet* because, ultimately, loving correctly is the central issue throughout the work. Love is either destroyed or enjoyed. Thus, *Constance* makes clear the connections between love and war. Von Esslin in "The Nazi" chapter makes war not love to the maid. It is an issue of ego-domination and conflict:

They were locked in silent combat now, like two experienced wrestlers, and he felt in the spider-like grip of her thin thighs

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and arms a kind of helplessness, an agony of submission and sexual abasement. She bowed before him as if she desired only one thing: to be trampled, to be spurned. . . . She was his, she submitted, and the thought excited his cupidity; he overwhelmed her as his army would soon overwhelm her country and people, raping it, wading in its blood. (*Constance*, 37–38)

The imagery throughout this section of the novel again recalls *Women in Love* significantly. The above scene brings vividly back the death-making of Gudrun and Gerald Crich. The chapter in which their union occurs is, in fact, titled "Death and Love," describing the conflict of values and individual nature that is central to the novel. In addition, the imagery of decay and dissolution that abounds in Lawrence's novel connects with the association Durrell makes between the German tanks and beetles: "Some might have seen them as obscene steel beetles manned by men dressed in helmets shaped like ugly turnips of the same steel" (*Constance*, 33).

The true motivation behind gnosticism is to re-establish the proper reality to the world dominated by such destructive impulses: "Within mankind . . . remains a buried memory of a pre-Adamic bliss. The task of gnosis—the term itself is Greek for knowledge—is to discover the route back to this wholeness" (Carley, 285–86). Within this scheme death becomes a positive force. Indeed, it is the paradox of death that has always been so difficult to understand in the work of Lawrence as well as in that of Durrell. The opposition is perhaps best defined as "Death-in-life" and "Life-in-death," to return at once to the Romantic inspiration and the gnostic heresy. In addition, the Romantic ideals of "dissolution" in Lawrence coincide clearly with the gnostic ideas of "death" in Durrell.

In Lawrence's middle and late work, such as *St. Mawr* and *The Man Who Died*, the idealization of death becomes particularly strong, with equally strong religious overtones. Death leads to transformation and resurrection. "The Reality of Peace" uses the rhetoric of prayer to make its point: "Sweet, beautiful death, come to our help. . . . Purify us with death, O death, cleanse from us the rank stench, the intolerable oneness with a negative humanity" (*Phoenix*, 686). Lawrence associates death as a metaphorical pattern, which describes individual transformation, to a more literal belief in social decay and destruction as a positive force. On both levels death is set in opposition to human will, which is the ultimate, permanent death. In *St. Mawr* Elizabeth and Mrs. Witt wish to escape through death, for they have found that their lives have become hardened and static: "And something in her longed to die, at least,

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positively: to be folded then at last into throbbing wings of mystery, like a hawk that goes to sleep."¹⁶ Ursula in *Women in Love* discovers the same possibility:

To die is also a joy, a joy of submitting to that which is greater than the known; namely, the pure unknown. That is a joy. But to live mechanised and cut off within the motion of the will, to live as an entity absolved from the unknown, that is shameful and ignominious. There is no ignominy in death. There is complete ignominy in an un replenished, mechanised life. (*Women*, 184-85)

The life/death polarity, in fact, can be seen as part of a larger dichotomy between spontaneity and will. The world Lawrence describes, England during World War I, finally has to celebrate death as salvation. Birkin describes this process to Ursula as "the flowering mystery of the death-process" and as the "dark river of dissolution" (*Women*, 164). The incapacity of love is based upon the unwillingness to die, to let go of the dominating will. Death is either the salvation or the final result. Gerald Crich in *Women in Love* is the antithesis to Rupert Birkin; Gerald is finally limited, representative of "death-in-life," while Birkin achieves some semblance of success through "life-in-death." Gerald's killing of his brother, which gives him the mark of Cain, sets up early in the novel a sense of foreboding that is fulfilled by his own death. There is an inevitability about the whole situation. A section from the original first chapter of the novel makes much the same point:

The incapacity to love, the incapacity to desire any woman, positively, with body and soul, this was a real torture, a deep torture indeed. Never to be able to love spontaneously, never to be moved by a power greater than oneself, but always to be within one's own control, deliberate, having the choice, this was horrifying, more deadly than death. Yet how was one to escape? How could a man escape from being deliberate and unloving, except a greater power, an impersonal, imperative love should take hold of him? And if the greater power should not take hold of him, what could he do but continue in his deliberateness, without any fundamental spontaneity? (*Phoenix II*, 99)

This passage refers to Birkin, but the point it makes extends to Gerald, as well as the other characters in *Women in Love*. Deliberateness is a synonym for will when dealing with the self and the world, a characteristic which Birkin moves towards overcoming and which Gerald celebrates. Lawrence, in fact, spends a good deal of time building up this characteristic in "The Industrial Magnate" chapter, finally connecting Gerald with the mechanical nature of modern society.

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Carley points out "that by dying one seizes power from Monsieur and escapes from subjection to him" (Carley, 288). Even in the beginning, in the first volume of the *Quintet*, *Monsieur*, we are given a full exposure to this entire system. Here Drexel recalls the speech of the gnostic adept, Akkad, who explained how they have awakened, as in the sleeping beauty myth, to the realities of their lives: "He began by speaking about the sense of inner estrangement and alienation from the so-called real world which was the mark of the religious nature when once it awakes from its sleep in the world."¹⁷ Then comes the realization that the "Good God was a dead one, and that He had been replaced by a usurper—a God of Evil" (*Monsieur*, 137).¹⁸ And finally, comes the central question about the death-character of the world:

What sort of God, the gnostic asks himself, could have organised things the way they are—this munching world of death and dissolution which pretends to have a Saviour, and a fountain of good at its base? What sort of God could have built this malefic machine of destruction, of self-immolation? Only the very spirit of the dark negative death-trend in nature—the spirit of nothingness and auto-annihilation. A world in which we are each other's food, each other's prey. (*Monsieur*, 138)

In opposition to this stands the acceptance of death and dissolution as a positive force, as it is in Lawrence. This can be seen clearly in relation to Durrell: "Suicide, for the gnostic, is a poetic act; a return to wholeness and an actualization of all the threads of one's past. Moreover, in dying, in refusing, one participates in the process of the redemption of nature" (Carley, 289).

Finally, it is significant that in opposition to the world these two writers look toward a fuller relationship as absolutely central. In the *La Stampa* interview Durrell says that his Eastern novel looks toward five as the central part of the psyche: "In the novel I am now working on, I try to portray the structure of the non-Western ego. In India the ego does not exist. The human condition is composed of five 'compartments,' and for me they represent the conscience" (*La Stampa*, 59). Thus in the last novel of the five, *Quinx*, we get another description of the five-part nature of the psyche: "They cohere to form a human being when you come together and create the old force-field quinx, the five-sided being with two arms, two legs and the kundalini as properties!" (*Quinx*, 15). The sexual act is fundamental to the realization of the true nature of the psyche, especially if we consider that the power of the quinx is realized in the *chakras*, the base of the spine. The connection between this center and the sexual act seems explicit. And the sexual act, as

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Lawrence knew, involves the dissolution of the ego. So in *Quinx*, as Durrell's narrator puts it:

I myself realised for the first time that sex is not dying, it is coming of age with the freedom of the woman. Its real secrets are as yet only half-fathomed in the West. The mathematics of the sexual act remain obscure. The power of five is really the riddle of the Quinx—solve it if you dare! (*Quinx*, 19)

The idea that the sexual act is the source of power over the "death-drift" is further supported by the fact that it also combats the entropy that is identified throughout the novel: "The sperm does not age as man himself does. Even an old man can make a young baby" (*Quinx*, 29). This paradox actually usurps the power of Monsieur.

The conclusion of a comparative study such as this one results in another interesting aspect, the realization that Durrell helps us understand Lawrence. A central image in the novel, associated with the quincunx, is the idea of trinity, especially in the relationship of Drexel, Piers, and Sylvie. *Quinx* begins with an allusion to this aspect of the story. As the characters return to Avignon, we are told, "Here they were to bury themselves in the three-cornered love which had once intrigued Blanford and caused him to try to forge a novel round the notion of this triune love" (*Quinx*, 11). The couple *as couple* is archaic, finally; for that combination is too restrictive. The idea of the trinity in the brother-sister incest relationship carries us beyond the bounds of the couple: "Like the product of the brother-sister incest this trinity comes to represent a movement beyond the original duality of the world. The three become a symbol of a new self" (Carley, 293). Again, Durrell shows that this idea is to be seen in opposition to the old idea of the discrete ego:

In further meditations upon the unholy trinity they form, I had a sudden small gleam of light. I suddenly saw the underlying unity of the three children as a total *self*, or the symbol of such an abstraction. Against the traditional duality-figure of our cosmology I placed a triune self, composed of two male and one female partner—a gnostic notion, if I remembered correctly. (*Monsieur*, 220)

One of the most difficult issues to resolve in *Women in Love* is the conclusion. Birkin says to Ursula as they sit by the fire, "You are enough for me as far as a woman is concerned. You are all women to me. But I wanted a man friend, as eternal as you and I are eternal" (*Women*, 472). The parallel relationships, Birkin and Ursula's and Gerald and Gudrun's, have run their courses, the first suggesting the possibilities of

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life, the second showing the "death-drift." Gerald has died, committed suicide, and Gudrun, like Livia, has drifted off to Germany. This last issue brought up in the novel has often been associated with the "Prologue to *Women in Love*," which is actually the first chapter, which Lawrence discarded. In it he describes the need for a male friend. Taken from the point of view that Durrell offers, however, the final scene in the novel can be understood as the ultimate problem Lawrence had to confront in the ego-dominated culture. Durrell's idea of three moves away from this type of culture. Karl Menninger in *Zahlwort und Ziffer*, his cultural history of numbers, states:

With three something new in the concept of number makes its appearance. In the I-You situation the ego is still held in tension with the You, but that which is above it, IT, the Third, the Many, is the world. (Carley, 293)

Of course, the point that Durrell is making is that even this is not enough. We need to push the idea further, toward the quincunx.

What the similarities between these two writers show, finally, is that both Lawrence and Durrell have a profound concern for the destructive element in materialistic society. Not much seems to have changed from the time during World War I, when Lawrence meditated on the fragments of dust that were the remnants of our civilization then, to 1985, when Durrell's narrator meditates about the possibility of nuclear annihilation. For each writer, the destructive direction of civilization has to be understood in terms of the individual. Society is, clearly, the reflection of individual consciousness. Lawrence hoped that the novel could, as he says in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, "reveal the most secret places of life: for it is in the *passional* secret places of life, above all, that the tide of sensitive awareness needs to ebb and flow, cleansing and freshening."¹⁹ Durrell, drawing on the additional power he found contained in gnostic thought, follows in the tradition of Lawrence by lamenting on the one hand the destructive nature of civilization and celebrating on the other hand the fracture of the hardened shell: "It was at this precise moment that reality prime rushed to the aid of fiction and the totally unpredictable began to take place!" (*Quinx*, 201).

¹ Lawrence Durrell, *Quinx: or, The Ripper's Tale* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 12. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Quinx*.

² D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix II*, ed. Warren Roberts and Harry T. Moore (London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 392. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Phoenix II*.

³ Lawrence Durrell, in an interview with Piero Sanavio, *La Stampa*, rpt. in

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World Press Review, Nov. 1983, p. 59. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *La Stampa*.

⁴ Lawrence Durrell, *Clea* (New York: Dutton, 1960), p. 141.

⁵ Colin Clarke, *River of Dissolution* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 3.

⁶ John Keats, *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1970), p. 526.

⁷ Lawrence Durrell, "From the Elephant's Back," *Poetry London/Apple Magazine*, No. 2 (1982), p. 8. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as "Elephant's Back."

⁸ James P. Carley, "Lawrence Durrell's Avignon Quincunx and Gnostic Heresy," in *Proceedings of the First National Lawrence Durrell Conference*, ed. Michael Cartwright, pub. as a Special Issue of *Deus Loci*, 5, No. 1 ([Bakersfield: California State College], Fall 1981 [i.e., 1982]), pp. 284–85. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as Carley.

⁹ D. H. Lawrence, *Collected Letters*, ed. Harry T. Moore (London: Heinemann, 1962), I, 519. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Letters*.

¹⁰ D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (1923; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), pp. 239–40. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Kangaroo*.

¹¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (1920; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 52. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Women*.

¹² Lawrence Durrell, *Livia: or, Buried Alive* (New York: Penguin, 1978), pp. 161–62. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Livia*.

¹³ Lawrence Durrell, *Constance: or, Solitary Practices* (New York: Viking, 1982), p. 133. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Constance*.

¹⁴ Lawrence Durrell, in his Introduction to *The Book of the It* by Georg Groddeck (New York: Vintage, 1961), p. vii.

¹⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Phoenix*, ed. Edward D. McDonald (1936; rpt. New York: Penguin, 1978), p. 672. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Phoenix*.

¹⁶ D. H. Lawrence, *St. Mawr* (1925; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), p. 104.

¹⁷ Lawrence Durrell, *Monsieur* (1974; rpt. New York: Penguin, 1984), p. 137. All further references to this work appear parenthetically as *Monsieur*.

¹⁸ The Faber edition of *Monsieur* includes a subtitle, *The Prince of Darkness*, that underlines the identity of Monsieur.

¹⁹ D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928; rpt. New York: Signet, 1959), p. 94.

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